

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: A CASE STUDY OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN BY A SCHOOL DISTRICT IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A STRATEGY TO ESTABLISH SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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This case study focused on the actions taken to create school-based professional learning communities during a two-year period of planning and implementation by a mid-sized, suburban school district located in the State of Maryland. The study examined the implementers' perceptions of the actions taken by the district. Archival documents and databases were utilized during secondary analysis of district actions.

Analysis using a social systems model revealed that during both planning and implementation periods district actions were directed largely to structural, political, cultural, and individual system approaches of supporting change. Analysis of transcripts from structured interviews with members of instructional leadership teams in a sample of ten of the 50 schools in the district was conducted.

The study found that a difference existed between the perceptions of district leaders and school-based leaders on the extent of use and the helpfulness of various district actions, thus highlighting the importance of addressing differential needs of schools. Despite differences, implementers were generally positive about the actions the district took. The study found differences in the degree of progress made by the

ten study schools in the development of the conditions of professional learning communities. Possible explanations are presented for differences in progress made by each of the ten study schools. Findings reinforce the value of using a heuristic model for analysis of systemic initiatives.

Recommendations include that districts use intentionality in designing actions to address differentiated school needs. It is further recommended that districts implement systemic inquiry-based self-study practices. Suggestions for future research include exploration of the relationship between professional learning communities, collective efficacy, and student achievement.

A CASE STUDY OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN BY A SCHOOL DISTRICT
IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A STRATEGY TO ESTABLISH
SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

By

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The decision to pursue a doctoral degree is one that is not made lightly in isolation from the other aspects of one's life and responsibilities. The decision to move forward with the doctoral program has a profound influence on those that surround you in your daily life. At no time is that more evident than when you reach the stage of completing your doctoral study and writing the dissertation.

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List of Abbreviations

APC - advanced professional certificate

CPDP - comprehensive professional development plan

PLCs - professional learning community or communities

CILT - Central Instructional Leadership Team

ILT (s) - Instructional Leadership Team (s) at a school level

NCLB - No Child Left Behind Act

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

Background

School reform has been the mantra of political rhetoric over the past decade. In the 2002 national and state elections, almost every political candidate identified education as one of their most critical campaign topics. Promises to improve public education were proliferate. Despite massive efforts to reform public schools so that all students receive an equitable education, achievement gaps still exist among groups of students. When states and school districts disaggregate the results of assessment data, minority students, students with disabilities, students living in poverty, and students who are learning English as a second language are not achieving at levels necessary for successful employment. Fullan (1999) stated, “A strong public school system...is the key to social, political, and economic renewal in society” (p. 1). He believed that the commitment to public school improvement must become a moral imperative for all; however, he acknowledged that the complexity of the times was creating confusion, frustration, and discouragement in achieving the changes needed.

Businesses and elected officials encouraged urgent reaction to reports such as *A Nation At Risk* (1983). The opening paragraph of the 1983 report set the tone for the next several decades of action in America’s public schools:

Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America, the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we

might well have viewed it as an act of war. . . . We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. (p. 5)

This report, as well as others, created a flurry of improvement activity across the nation's schools. As institutions that face public scrutiny and are subject to external policy decisions, schools face the interventions of state and federal legislators, locally elected officials, and school board members. The tone and approach of their legislated actions send clear messages about their judgments of public schools. While the current environment suggests that multiple *publics* are judging schools in this country, parents and others often resist any real change in structures, curriculum, and approaches to providing a quality education.

DuFour and Eaker (1992) described the challenges schools and districts face with regard to creating real improvement:

Reform movements are complicated events. Each has several interested audiences with different agendas. One of these audiences is composed of policy-makers, policy-watchers, and citizens at-large. This group is most interested in the wider issues of reform: the recommendations of commissioners, new legislation, and the commitment and concern of top officials. Another audience includes the citizens and parents of specific communities. While interested in the larger reform scene, these spectators focus their attention on their own school board, superintendent, principals, and teachers. . . . Amid all of these diverse audiences is a seasoned, tired, and wary group of players - teachers and administrators. . . . They also see in reform programs suggestions that they already know are needed. And they know that some elements of the proposed reform could seriously harm education if they were put into practice. . . . The superintendents, principals, and teachers who are asked to improve the schools often are unsure of exactly how to proceed. (p. ix)

One approach to accountability has been to establish national coherent and consistent standards of expectation for specified curriculum areas. Cohen (as cited in Ladd, 1996) described past attempts at systemic reform as resting on several key assumptions. First, if reformers in state and federal education agencies set ambitious goals and create new frameworks for national curriculum standards and assessments, then

instruction will improve and expectations will be more demanding. Second, an assumption was that intellectually engaging instruction was a reasonable enough goal for American schools. Third, assumptions were made that states could carry the weight of reform and accountability efforts. Finally, it was assumed that those efforts would end inequities in student performance. The principal accountability mechanism in the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* is *adequate yearly progress (AYP)*, which holds districts and schools accountable for student achievement improvements. The concept of AYP suggests that schools and districts hold all the control of variables that influence all children meeting the academic standards. The involvement of the federal government in setting new education standards has created a strong sense of urgency to consider ways of meeting AYP in school districts across the country. The *NCLB* reform movement expands options for parent choice about schools, and placed greater emphasis on teacher quality, and on classroom methods and practice.

The expansion of the accountability model of reform to include high schools has increased tensions in those schools. High schools have been far less exposed to the impact of accountability testing in Maryland. Federal and state accountability assessments that are now mandated from kindergarten through twelfth grade, place urgent demands on school districts to identify approaches to systematically improve their schools. This urgency far exceeds the improvement efforts of prior state efforts. The historical picture of reform, however, remains one of repeated failure, stopping unsuccessfully over and over “at the heart of the school’s enterprise- the classroom” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The failures of the past decades lead us to a new thinking about how schools and districts must approach improvement efforts. Michael Fullan (2001) set the tone for a new beginning:

None of the current strategies being employed in educational reform result in any widespread change. . . The first step toward liberation, in my view, is the realization that we are facing a lost cause. Initiation of change rarely occurs without an advocate, and one of the most powerful is the chief district administrator, with his or her staff. . . it is the superintendent and central staff who combine access, internal authority, and resources necessary to seek out external funds for a particular change program and/or to obtain board support (p.59).

Despite the multiple approaches to school reform initiated during the 1980s and the 1990s, it appears that few have had the desired sustained impact of improvement in student achievement. As research has considered the reason for this lack of sustained improvement, researchers began to look at the role of the school district and district leaders in school reform.

The Problem

The continuing failure of numerous reform efforts over two decades has resulted in a growing tendency to conclude that public schools in America are incapable of transforming themselves. Over the past decade the unit of focus for educational change has been the school. Districts were considered bureaucratic barriers to improvement, resulting in funding agencies and researchers bypassing the district to work directly with schools. Applebaum (2002) argued that the notion that districts interfere with school improvement has changed. “Most model developers learned through their own research or their own experience that sustainability is dependent on district support” (p. 1). Applebaum further argued that districts must now find new roles in leading their schools to institutionalize the change.

Fullan (2001) stressed that districts must get more involved in the leadership of reform. The stressors for public educators have increased tremendously as a result of *NCLB* and AYP. Teachers and school administrators alike are struggling to determine what efforts they can make to ensure that their schools meet the AYP requirement. They,

too, are looking to their districts for guidance and support. More recent literature has begun to present the view that districts can help. The case studies conducted by Elmore and Burney (1999), Foley (2001), and McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) all showed that the superintendent, as chief district administrator, and central district staff play important roles in advocating and supporting district change or improvement initiatives. These case studies emphasized the role that district leadership and support have in the identification and implementation of sustained reform efforts.

Teacher Quality

Linda Darling-Hammond (1996) stressed the need to professionalize teaching. Hord (1997) asserted that school improvement is directly dependent on teacher development and the improvement of teachers' instructional capacity and practice. If the changes and improvements were not moved into the classroom, little change would occur for students. The link to teacher practice is confirmed when one considers the research on the implementation of reforms. Teachers have a tremendous power to either move a reform initiative forward or to influence its failure through the lack of implementation in the classroom. This implementation influence may result from lack of understanding of the reform initiative, lack of support for the reform initiative, or diminishing implementation due to lack of teacher and classroom support over time. Leithwood and Louis (1998) suggested that:

the task is not just to create a school organization capable of implementing the current set of reform initiatives . . . in the context of today's turbulent environments. Rather, the task is to design an organization capable of productively responding, not only to such current initiatives in today's environment, but the endless number of initiatives, including new definitions of school effectiveness, that inevitable (sic) will follow. (p. 6)

This view suggests the need for teachers and others at the district and school level to become thinking, learning, and engaged participants in the school improvement process – districts must become learning organizations.

Strong common themes tie all these district case studies together indicating that the need for central district development of a well-defined and structured improvement approach. This approach must give attention to capacity building through professional development as a central component of change for improvement, and small and professional learning communities as a structure of organization to intensify positive learning relationships for teachers and students (Hord, 1997, 2000, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Morrissey, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The lack of sustained improvement during the last decade can partially be attributed to the poor focus and lack of long-term commitment that comes from initiatives that are not centrally supported by the district. Massell (2000) noted:

School districts strongly influence the strategic choices that schools make to improve teaching and learning. Districts – composed of local school boards, superintendents, and central office staff – act as gatekeepers for federal and state policy by translating, interpreting, supporting, or blocking actions on their schools' behalf. (p. 1)

Massell argued that most districts view the building of teacher capacity as the most critical component of change. In recent years, researchers have concluded that the most promising forms of district professional development beyond creating professional development centers include initiatives that build teacher networks and foster peer mentoring relationships. Findings of current research suggests that districts must take a strong role in creating a culture shift that values the engagement of teachers and administrators in ongoing improvement-focused inquiry. Hord (1997), Massell (2000),

and Morrissey (2000) found that the development of professional learning communities (PLCs) is one of the most promising approaches to building teacher capacity, and to creating the culture change required for schools to engage in continuous improvement. Based on current research, the district must take a strong role in accomplishing this culture shift to teachers and administrators engaging in the culture of inquiry.

The urgency for continuous improvement has intensified post-NCLB, yet district leaders are left wondering how to provide support to schools in the context of AYP. Will the roles played by districts prior to *NCLB* be effective in supporting school improvement now? If districts perceive that they are taking identified actions in serving their roles, will these actions be perceived as helpful and supportive by school-based administrators? Should district leaders define specified programs and approaches to improvement that will be implemented district-wide?

Research Questions

Despite the considerable study of individual schools and their experiences with professional learning communities (PLCs) by Hord (1997) and others, little is known about the role a district plays in supporting the development of PLCs either in individual schools or district-wide. This study has addressed this gap through an investigation of the methods used by a suburban school district to support the development of system-wide professional learning communities.

The central research questions guiding this study are:

1. What were the actions the district took to support schools in the development of PLCs?

2. How did individual key instructional leaders in schools describe their perspectives of the influence or impact of district actions intended to support the development of PLCs at their school sites?
3. How did the actions the District took address the multiple systems of the adapted social system model?

The study asked questions of a *what* and *how* nature, suggesting that a case study methodology that reviewed archival survey data and artifact documents was preferred. This study, about the development of PLCs in schools, sought to determine what alignment existed between the perceptions of the central district leadership views and the views of school-based leaders about actions that supported PLC development. In this study I examined the extent to which the following assumptions, gleaned from current research on district reforms, were supported by my findings: (a) instructional leaders in schools where teachers perceived higher PLC readiness and in schools where teachers perceived lower PLC readiness would respond differently to the actions of the district; (b) instructional leaders in schools where teachers perceived higher PLC readiness would perceive district actions as more helpful, and thus be able to make greater progress in developing PLCs; and (c) instructional leaders in schools where teachers perceived lower PLC readiness would perceive district actions as less helpful, and would find it difficult to make progress in developing PLCs.

The research questions and several assumptions guided the focus of the data gathering and analysis. This study examined the implementers' understanding of the actions taken by the district. To understand the perspective of the individual schools included in this study, it was important to review various survey data gathered by the

Suburban District within the context of the District actions. Secondary analysis of all District databases, archival records, and documents occurred as components of the study.

Overview of the Study

A single case method was utilized in this study. The study spanned the first two years of the implementation of a mid-sized suburban district's initiative to establish professional learning communities (PLC) in all schools across the district. During the 2002-2003 school year, the planning and preparation year, the underlying structure and organizational elements were created to support the development of the conditions of PLCs. The 2003-2004 school year, year one of the implementation of the PLC initiative, deployed the concept and the PLC development task to the school level through the school-based Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs). This study examined the implementation of PLCs in schools across the Suburban District exploring the impact of district leadership actions and decisions on the development of school-based PLCs. The actions of the District were analyzed within the context of a conceptual map of district actions. The study further explored how actions and policies set forth by district leadership were perceived by school-based leaders as influencing the development of PLCs in their schools.

The district took actions to promote the development of PLCs across all schools. This study involved secondary analysis of data gathered by the Suburban District Central Instructional Leadership Team (CILT), as part of the action cycle of inquiry to improve District capacity to support the development of school-based professional learning communities. The Central Instructional Leadership Team (CILT) served as the core district decision makers. The data upon which I have conducted secondary analysis was gathered based on the sampling decisions of the District. As part of the action cycle, the

four members of the CILT sought to determine differences between the perceptions of ILT members in the ten case study schools and their own assessments of the helpfulness and extensiveness of the actions taken by the Suburban School District in creating school-based PLCs.

After gathering all primary data and documents, the QSR NVivo qualitative research software was used to analyze district action patterns and to gain insights into how these actions were perceived by members of the Instructional Leadership Teams in ten district schools.

Overview of Findings

This dissertation explored the role of the district in school reform. Providing leadership and building capacity was the focus of the work done by the Suburban District CILT members. The district that was the central focus of this study framed reform efforts in a context of professional learning communities, based on an underlying belief that continuous learning by instructional administrators and teachers leads to improved classroom instruction and increased student learning. Theories that may have been effective in producing short-term achievement improvements pre-*NCLB* may or may not be effective in the new environment of altered roles and governance since the enactment of the *NCLB Act*.

The analysis of the actions taken by the key central leadership of the Suburban District found that differences existed in the perceptions of central leadership staff and the staff at individual study schools. Differences in these perceptions concerned the amount that certain district actions were used and the degree of support each action offered in the school efforts to develop PLCs. The study also found that certain district

actions were used to address the needs of select staff groups or to address the implementation of specific strategies within the reform. Thus, certain district actions were used in different proportions over time. This investigation of district leadership actions to develop PLCs was timely and critical to the continued development of understanding of the district role in school improvement and reform. The urgency created by the AYP requirement for schools and districts established the need to move forward with such investigations quickly. In fact, given the federal requirements for research-based practices, it is an obligation that both academic institutions and districts themselves engage in formal investigations of the impact of district actions and roles in reform.

Study Significance

Given that multiple districts across the nation are facing the presses of AYP and many are embarking on the journey of developing strategies for improving teacher practices and formats for teacher professional development. It was therefore valuable studying a single case with defined protocol and data analysis methodology. The purpose of this study was to explore how districts act as they provide leadership and support to their multiple schools. The study provided insight into how District actions are linked to the perceptions of school-based administrators as they seek support for their work. There is significance in the potential lessons learned to guide actions of districts who wish to refine their efforts to establish PLCs or initiate newly coordinated efforts. The study provides insight for other districts on how district actions are perceived by individual school-based leadership teams as they establish PLCs and the cultural conditions of learning organizations.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) found that the significance of a study is grounded in its ability to link the research to concerns of policy and practice. As districts attempt to define a new role for their work within the governance structure of public schools, superintendents and their district leadership staff must determine the actions and strategies most suited to their new role. The light shed on district leadership action provides district leadership staff with a framework to support their strategic planning of future district initiatives. Policymakers and practitioners consulting this study will gain reflective notions to support their decisions regarding district interactions with schools during systemic change initiatives.

Limitations

Limitations on the transferability of the study must also be acknowledged. As an exploratory study the transferability must be understood as limited in multiple ways. Exploratory studies provide recommendations for policy development and for identifying needed areas of continued research. Because of the richness of the data this study does provide transferable insights into reform. The limited ability to transfer these district case study results to all other districts is acknowledged (Yin, 2003). Yin argued that the purpose of case study research is not to develop samples to generalize to multiple populations. Rather, the purpose is to put forth some theory and to allow that theory to be further explored and generalized through that continued theoretical exploration. Such is the case with this district case study. Application of the “district action conceptual framework” and the “adapted social system model for schools and districts” utilized in this study should be further explored.

This study had no intent of reflecting a causal relationship between the actions taken by the district and the academic progress of individual schools developing PLCs. The information gained from this exploratory study can be further investigated in future research to gain a greater understanding of the established links between teacher efficacy, PLCs, and student achievement.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The problem and approach to the study were introduced in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides an overview of relevant bodies of literature that guided the development the focus of the study, the development of the conceptual map, and presents the social system model utilized in the analysis of data. Chapter 2 reviews research that focuses on school reform, as well as reviewing specific case studies that report on systemic school reform efforts. Research is also reviewed on schools as professional learning communities. Finally, an application of the social system model to schools as learning organizations is presented.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for the study. A review of the conceptual underpinning of the data analysis was included. Discussion of instruments used, sampling, data analysis and use of computer-aided models are presented. Chapter 3 also addresses case study standards of quality.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the district context. The analysis is framed within the social system model adapted for schools and districts. Key systems of the Suburban District were the focus of analysis of the District context. The impact of contextual factors on the transformational process in fostering professional learning communities in schools across the district is considered.

Chapter 5 describes the actions taken by the Suburban District to systemically develop PLCs. The actions taken in determining a reform approach, planning and implementing the initiative and transforming to an inquiry-based district are described. Reactions of members of ten school-based Instructional Leadership Teams to the District's actions are described in Chapter 6. Finally, in Chapter 7 I respond to the central study questions and draw conclusions, make recommendations, and outline the implications of the study.

Definition of Terms

Accountability: A state or national policy with a primary emphasis on measured student performance, the creation of complex standards by which schools can be compared and a creation of systems of rewards, consequences and intervention strategies as incentives for improvement. (Arbogast, 2004, p. 22)

Central Instructional Leadership Team: consists of the Superintendent of Schools, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Directors of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Coordinator of Professional Development.

Collective Efficacy: The shared beliefs of capability of teachers and administrators that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students. (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 153)

Cultural System: See Organizational Culture

District: Suburban School District

District actions: Refers to actions determined by the Central Instructional Leadership Team for District implementation.

District leadership: Central Instructional Leadership Team

Individual Systems in Schools: Human needs and motivations that influence how people behave in organizations when dealing with motivations, fairness, equity issues, efficacy, and fulfillment of their personal needs. (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 127)

Inquiry: A process of asking questions and seeking answers so that the program can be gradually improved. Inquiry is an evaluation a way that the system or a community of action researchers can provide information for itself about the effectiveness of its efforts in an ongoing basis. (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 114)

Learning Organization: Learning organizations are organization in which participants continually expand their capacities to create and achieve, where novel patterns of thinking are encouraged, where collective aspirations are nurtured, where participants learn how to learn together, and where the organization expands its capacity for innovation and problem solving. (Senge, 1990, p. 5)

Organizational Culture: A system of shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinctive identity; dealing with the feel, sense, atmosphere, character, or image of an organization. (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 165)

Political System: The political arena in and around an organization that is central of the different types of power, legitimate or otherwise, that influence the actions and decisions of the organization. (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 202)

Professional Learning Community: A district, school or school subgroup that fosters a culture in which learning by all is valued, encouraged, and supported. Places where the staff, intentionally and collectively, engage in learning and work on issues directly related to classroom practice that positively impacts student learning. (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. 67)

Social Systems Model: Social organizations that are carefully and deliberately planned or emerge spontaneously, comprising interacting personalities bound together in an organic relationship. (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 22)

Structural Systems in Schools: Bureaucratic structures consisting of the institutional and managerial functions involving mediation with internal and external audiences, implementation of law, resource allocation, and technical structures and processes of teaching and learning. (Hoy & Miskel, p.116)

Teacher Efficacy: The teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context. (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 153)

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

This study examined the role of a district and district leadership in a systems change initiative designed to promote the development of professional learning communities (PLCs). Local districts across the United States are faced with responding to the demands and requirements of *NCLB*. Given that concerted efforts to foster school improvement at a state level have been in place for a decade, lessons learned through those efforts can be applied in responding to the demands created by the new achievement requirements defined in the *NCLB Act*. The sense of urgency created by the AYP academic focus of *NCLB* leaves district leaders wondering how to approach meeting these demands. How will districts reform their schools to create the improvements in achievement needed?

Some districts are reported to be considering turning away millions of federal dollars as the way to avoid the challenges and requirements of the new federal law. Other districts do not disagree with the goal of helping all students learn at high levels and the foci set by standards and are willing to engage in efforts to improve but are uncertain of the most promising actions to take in this new environment. With every student's learning status at heightened importance in meeting AYP, the current context of individual student and teacher accountability has increased pressure and stress on everyone involved. A recent study reported that many school districts are developing intensive efforts to design strategies to address the achievement requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Center for Education Policy, 2004). Districts are experiencing a strong sense of urgency to design such approaches. This study explored the approach

taken by one suburban school district in Maryland to design an approach for improving classroom practice and student achievement. The literature reviewed in this chapter illuminated some of the approaches and strategies used by other districts during systemic reform efforts.

This chapter begins with a review of the research and commentary on the role of the district in reforming the educational experience provided in the classroom. The work of researchers who have written extensively on the topic of district leadership of achievement improvement initiatives were reviewed (Elmore, 1993; Elmore, 1997; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Massell, 2000). This review highlights key elements of systemic district reforms in several districts. The work of Richard Elmore (1993) explored the approach taken by one school system's superintendent, Anthony Alvarado, while leading New York District #2 in designing a systemic reform initiative on improved learning in reading. Elmore (1997) subsequently conducted a follow-up case study of another district, in San Diego, California, where Alvarado was now Chancellor. Through these studies Elmore drew conclusions about system change that informed this study.

Other district case studies reviewed in this chapter reported on the work of district attempts to create systemic change through structural changes, personnel changes, or implementation of new programs. These case reviews analyzed the style of application of key elements of district reform efforts. Recent literature argues that the district plays a key role in helping schools to improve (Applebaum, 2002; Elmore, 1997; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Schools can no longer be expected to improve without district leadership and support. Similarly, no districts can now accept "islands of success" but must ensure equitable quality instruction for all students in all

classrooms across the district (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The chapter will review the literature that argues that the district must play a strong leadership role if improvements are to be sustained.

The next body of literature reviewed in this chapter describes a model or framework for creating district-wide change to the culture of a learning organization. Hord and others (Morrissey, 2000; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Hord, 2000, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003) have written extensively on the success of individual schools in creating achievement gains in schools with the conditions of PLCs in evidence. The review of research on this model suggested that unless school districts engage in certain actions to move schools to a culture of inquiry, the progress made on improved achievement will not be sustained. There is a present urgency of purpose in examining what researchers have found to usefully guide districts' efforts to support school improvement. The deadline of 2014 for the attainment of all achievement requirements looms on a not too distant horizon.

To institutionalize change, districts must initiate and sustain transformational efforts that change the systemic context where teachers work and learn (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). In the final literature discussed in this chapter, the utility of a social system model for schools and districts will be examined. Although the model was largely viewed as a conceptual model at the time of this study, promising applications to district work will be discussed.

Based on the research of Hipp and Huffman (2003), critical attributes were identified as essential to the existence of each of Hord's five dimensions of PLCs. Relevant case studies presented the most promising actions and strategies implemented by the superintendent and other district leadership in a context of school reform. As

district leadership actions were revealed, their alignment with the attributes and dimensions of PLCs was considered. Given the literature cited in this chapter that argues for a greater district role in school improvement, the examination of the impact of district leadership actions on the development of identified PLC phenomenon was critical. This study was designed to examine the role of district action on PLC development, with similar analysis of the role that district actions plays in the development of the critical attributes of PLC dimensions. How do district actions interface with a broader system of transformational processes that alter organizations? Can a school build on the actions of the district to make progress in changing the culture of schools?

District Level Change Initiatives Prior to No Child Left Behind

During the initial decade of the standards and accountability movement preceding the enactment of *NCLB*, the roles of various levels of government with oversight of education became confused and intermingled. In the early 1990s, Elmore (1993) examined the debate about the local level responsibility for determining the type of service provided through local school systems within the context of growing state accountability initiatives. Then, as now, the local public education consumer considered the local government and local school boards and their superintendents as primarily responsible for decisions made regarding the quality of local education services. This perception arose because historically locally elected or appointed school boards guided local education policy. During the 1990s, policy actions undertaken by many states altered the roles, responsibilities, and functions of state and local levels of government and the local school system administrative responsibility for education. Gradually more authority for the required *ends* of public schools rose to the state level.

Elmore (1993) found that as a result of state policy changes, modifications were made to the definitions of educational expectations. There was a new focus on instructional improvement and systemic reform. Over the past decade systemic reform has come to mean efforts by school systems to orchestrate multiple state policies on curriculum and testing. While instructional improvement used to mean that the local boards and administration would determine changes to the program of services and curriculum offered to students, under state requirements for accountability the term *instructional improvement* now means that:

the objectives of policy focus on increasing students' access to academic learning. As the state role has developed over the past decade, state policymakers have begun to realize that past reforms have had a piecemeal and fragmentary effect on local schools. . . Hence, the push for systemic approaches to instructional improvement results from a desire to increase coherence among separate state policies and focus those policies on the central goal of improved student learning. . . orchestrating multiple state policies – curriculum, testing, teacher education and professional development The type of policy instruments being used in systemic approaches to instructional improvement are amenable to direct administration from the state level or to administration through intermediate organizations other than local districts. (Elmore, 1993, p. 97)

As a result of these policy changes, the roles of the local school board and local administration were modified. School boards that in the past engaged in setting goals and objectives for desired outcomes for the system now found that the federal and state governments assumed that role. A new role was defined for local school boards who were unclear about their new responsibilities.

Another change that caused confusion on the part of local school boards and administrations was the focus that state level policies placed on the individual school as the unit of change. In the early 1990s, Elmore (1993) suggested, “the unit of intervention for state policy has increasingly become the school, with the district treated as ‘context’ rather than having a clearly defined role” (p. 98). This pattern of focusing on the school

as the unit of intervention created a sense that schools were the unit of responsibility and thus of decision- making. The role of the central office administration, including the superintendent and school board, appeared to be compromised and superseded.

Over the past two decades state policy actions, accountability efforts, and technical interventions that focused on the school caused many school districts to defer responsibilities and decision-making to schools – involving them in site-based management. Federal action further influenced district decision-making structure and increased the interdependence of local, state, and now federal responsibility for educational decisions.

Elmore (1993) argued that regardless of the precise effect of state and federal mandates on local policy-making and action, the desired effect of uniformity of opportunity for children had not been achieved. He concluded that the conditions under which local jurisdictions operated would continue to change in order to address the increasing emphasis on student academic learning as the policy outcome. He observed “these shifts portend significant challenges for the traditional role of local districts” (p. 100).

Influence of H.R.1 – No Child Left Behind

With the passage of *NCLB* in 2002, the focus on the performance and accountability of individual schools continued. Specific consequences were outlined in the law for schools not making AYP as defined and negotiated between the state education agency and the U.S. Department of Education. Elmore (1993) found that with the state and national policy role increasingly expanding, the focus on what individual students learn, what schools teach, and the credentials that define a highly qualified teacher that, “the school is the vital delivery system, the state is the policy setter (and

chief paymaster), and nothing in between is very important” (p. 102). There are now many questions about the new nature of the district role in education policy setting and in public school leadership.

While this ethically defined purpose exists for local boards and district superintendents and their staffs, the provisions of *NCLB* create a context in which local districts are viewed as a component of the layered governmental bureaucracy, with the local district viewed as being responsible for the adaptation of federal and state policy to the local context. The confusion, therefore, continues regarding what it is that local districts do when they say they are providing leadership to the school district in school reform efforts.

In the early 1990s, Elmore (1993) argued that studies conducted on interactions between district-level and school-level personnel confirmed that there was little district-level guidance and assistance on issues such as curriculum and instruction. Elmore found that only 9% of any of the district’s work had anything to do with schools directly and that less than 3% had anything to do with areas of curriculum. He reported:

The technical tasks associated with producing student learning are not supervised, managed, or coordinated in any serious sense across managerial levels within school districts. . . The study concluded that districts typically do not use a variety of policies in a concerted way to influence teaching in schools; instead, their approach tends to be scattered, piecemeal, and, for the most part weak in influencing teaching. (p. 112)

Elmore (1993) also found that studies of school principals confirmed the pattern of district-school interaction. School principals spend a large fraction of their time responding to district administrators – over 30 % for elementary school principals and 40% for secondary principals. Though this response pattern existed, district-level administrators exercised little authority over principals and their schools. Such reporting and contacts between the two administrative groups is seldom related to curriculum and

instruction. School principals saw themselves as playing an important role in mediating district curriculum and instructional policies at the school level. This was true to a greater extent at the secondary level than at the elementary level.

Elmore (1993) further stated, “Superintendents spend most of their time in short interactions with small numbers of people on matters largely unrelated to curriculum and instruction” (p. 115). Elmore argued that this picture defined a system in which key instructional policy decisions are passed from federal to state levels to principals to teachers with little effective focus or guidance. He claimed that given these conditions, one would have to be suspicious about the readiness of local districts to actively participate in the process of improving teaching and learning:

One might think about explaining district involvement in instructional improvement as a two-step problem. First, if our earlier analysis of districts as units of government is true, then districts must find some niche in the intergovernmental system, or arrive at some resolution of their competing responsibilities as units of government in a federal system of governance. Four such responsibilities were outlined earlier: (1) mobilizing support and buffering policies from other levels of government; (2) developing and testing new policy ideas; (3) balancing developmental allocative and redistributive functions across levels of government; and (4) adapting policies from other levels of government to local needs and circumstances. (p. 119)

Elmore suggested that the local governance role was to provide coherence and focus on the strategies used for the improvement initiatives. The focus of these reform initiatives must address the local values and beliefs as well as the local context of the school system. This could be interpreted to include the decisions made relative to strategies for improvement and addressing core causes of failure to perform. Allocation of local resources would then need to prioritize the funding of these strategies. These decisions rest most appropriately with the local board, superintendent, and executive staff. The district leadership decisions would be evidence of the district commitment to the reform initiative.

Once this niche is defined, it provides for an activist role on the part of the district in dealing with the internal and external forces and sources of authority. Pressures exist from the communities, both internal and external, for attention to instructional issues. One can assume that with the present focus on individual schools as the lever for improvement, they are managing to navigate similar factors in trying to respond to the demands on them for improvement. Similarly, districts could navigate the demands and pressures in ways that respond to questions raised by Elmore (1993):

- What pressures and incentives exist in the community for attention to matters of instruction? How do district administrators read and interpret these pressures?
- What pressures and incentives exist in external policies for attention to matters of instruction? How do district administrators read and interpret these pressures?
- What resources exist within the district for assistance to schools and teachers in matters of instruction? How do district administrators allocate those resources to reflect the district leaders' priorities?
- What are the district leadership's priorities for instructional assistance? How are district resources for instructional assistance and improvement organized? How are they funded so that they assist schools?
- What policies or practices exist at the district level for defining responsibilities, within the central office and in schools, for instructional improvement? How do the actions of district leaders reflect these policies? (p. 120)

Considering the district responses to such questions reveals the roles and responsibilities that a local district defines for the superintendent and district level leadership staff.

Districts as the Focus of School Improvement

Elmore's work with District #2 and Superintendent Alvarado began to report a shift in the attention given to schools as the focus of improved instruction to the importance of the district in improving teaching and learning. The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) observed 22 districts in California, Colorado, Florida,

Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, and Texas over a two-year period to observe district capacity building strategies (Massell, 2000).

The four major strategies identified by the CPRE staff as most commonly utilized by these districts were:

(a) interpreting and using data; (b) building teacher knowledge and skills; (c) aligning curriculum and instruction; and (d) targeting interventions on low-performing students and/or schools. Districts were likely to use these four strategies as a “major mechanism for enacting improvement” (p. 1).

Massell emphasized the role these 22 districts played in helping individual schools with data development and interpretation and improvement planning. Districts were taking a more active role in focusing the schools on data, developing high level expertise in data development and improvement planning at the central office level. The local school district provided individual school and district profiles to all schools within the context of twice yearly day long data interpretation sessions.

Although the effectiveness of their work was not evaluated, all districts described support for professional development as part of the district responsibility. One district referred to as the “Learning Community School District” turned some of its more traditional workshop formats into opportunities for teachers to experience a coherent, system-designed body of knowledge. Two of the districts required their principals to conduct action research projects and collect data. Some of the principals mirrored these initiatives with their teachers. Massell (2000) argued:

There has been a strong tendency in recent federal and state policy initiatives to bypass or ignore the role of districts in the change process. Schools are the foci of accountability systems, and when they fail to meet performance standards they are increasingly subject to some form of reconstitution or other sanctions. However, districts remain the legal and fiscal agents that oversee and guide schools. In

many ways, districts are *the* major source of capacity building for schools . . .
(p.6)

Since the publication of the CPRE Policy Brief (2000), *NCLB* has altered the landscape of accountability for districts. While Elmore (2002) and Massell (2000) stressed the need for districts to be engaged in direct and forceful guidance to sustained district and school improvement efforts, the *NCLB* Act for the first time placed districts in the same system of sanctions enforced for schools in need of improvement. Like schools, districts will be placed on the federal list of non-improving districts if the district fails to meet AYP for specific district parameter requirements, the *ALL* category or any subgroup assessment scores. As a result, districts have an increasing sense of urgency to intervene and provide direct leadership to individual school improvement efforts. The total improvement across all district schools dictates the status of the district performance as reported to and by the U.S. Office of Education. Massell stated, “What districts do influences how schools as organizations address the performance goals set by states, and whether or not they have the necessary capacity to do so” (p. 6).

The enactment of *NCLB* has created altered relationships in school governance. The arguments of Elmore (2002) and Massell (2000) described a modified role of governance and guidance for both districts and boards of education. Massell (2000) argued that policymakers should attend closely to the strategies districts utilized to influence the improvement efforts of individual schools within the district. The case studies conducted by CPRE (2000) Elmore (1993) and Elmore and Burney (1997) suggested that districts tended to identify a central focused lever for improvement efforts upon which to build a strategic plan for accelerated learning. The research reviewed suggests that significant issues exist that must be addressed through the central guidance of the district. Lacking that guidance, schools will continue the ineffective piecemeal,

ever changing approaches to improved teaching and learning. Equitable quality of instruction across schools will not occur.

The National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR) issued a similar policy brief (Applebaum, 2002) as that issued by CPRE (2000). The NCCSR brief highlighted that prior to 2002 comprehensive school reform (CSR) models bypassed districts in their work with schools on improvement of instruction. They believed that it was more efficient and effective to work directly with schools and not with districts. In fact, districts were viewed as barriers to improvement. Through research and their own direct experience, CSR developers learned that districts are necessary partners if efforts are to be sustained over time.

CSR developers have identified several critical roles of districts if comprehensive models are to be successfully implemented: (a) ideological, financial, and political commitments; (b) decision-making structures appropriately assigned to schools or districts; (c) providing supporting professional development; and (d) preventing distraction from reform efforts by focusing district and school efforts. NCCSR stressed that school districts are active change agents with the potential to have a significant impact on teaching and learning.

The organization and culture of the district impact teacher commitment and attitudes in positive ways if the district focuses on instruction, keeps teachers informed of best practices, and encourages teachers and schools to take risks. The district should: (a) make efforts to increase the knowledge of your teachers and administrators, thus increasing district human capital; (b) develop learning communities in which teachers have access to various forms of professional training that addresses their needs; (c) encourage teachers to read professional literature; (d) make professional development

permeate the district; (e) encourage a set of shared values that focus on learning and foster a collective identity; (f) involve practitioners by increasing collaboration; and (g) develop relationships inside and outside the district to better communicate and align goals and actions.

Many of the NCCSR (Applebaum, 2002) findings regarding the district's role in improvement described cultural and normative context elements that required a systemic approach. Common themes of professional study, e.g., focused and intentional systemic improvement efforts, setting priorities for resource allocation, were evident throughout the literature reviewed thus far. District leadership must analyze aspects of district and individual school performance to determine the most significant needs of the district and identify the most potentially effective lever around which to organize systemic district improvement strategies.

Schools as Autonomous Organizations

Elmore (2002) discussed his view of schools and district ability to improve the urgent need for effective professional development:

Unfortunately, schools and school systems were not designed to respond to the pressure for performance that standards and accountability bring, and their failure to translate this pressure into useful and fulfilling work for students and adults is dangerous to the future of public education. (p. 3)

Elmore stated this more clearly when he argued:

Schools, as organizations, aren't designed as places where people are expected to engage in sustained improvement of their practice, where they are supported in this improvement, or where they are expected to subject their practice to the scrutiny of peers or the discipline of evaluations based on student achievement. (p. 4)

Teachers generally operate in the same manner as teachers did throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, as purely autonomous and in isolation of each other. Elmore (2002)

argued that if districts understood the importance of professional development in the improvement of schools and the school system, they would already have a well-defined and clearly articulated system of professional development that is job-embedded and that focuses teachers and the entire system on the classroom. Elmore further asserted that “it would be an organization in which administrators, at the school and system level, think their main job is to support the interaction of teachers and students around the mastery of specific content” (p. 25). This suggests that what the district does matters – in terms of expectations for the roles and responsibilities of its staff, in terms of clear messages to the administrators and teachers, and the way in which people are to spend their time in the improvement of the system and schools therein.

Systems that view the work of improvement as described by Elmore (2002) require central office and school administrators with considerable knowledge about the instructional practices that are necessary for effective classrooms. Their demonstrated expertise is essential in their work with teachers in these classrooms. Not only must districts be clear in these expectations and messages, but also set priorities, “clearly stating which problems of instructional practice are central and which are peripheral to overall improvement before deciding to allocate professional development resources” (p. 25). Districts must reorganize themselves and their basic structures in order to support sustained, job-embedded professional learning on the part of teachers.

As district leadership ponders the role to play in enhancement of school improvement, their efforts will be more successful if they address the five areas Elmore (2002) identified as “counter-culture” to the work of system improvement. First, Elmore stated that the task of improvement is one that school systems and schools are not designed to perform. Many of the people who work in schools think that improvement is

neither possible nor worthwhile. Teachers are described as being steeped in a work environment in which all new practices are invented within the walls of the classroom and teachers have little exposure to the arena of research and new and challenging ideas. Therefore, it is expected that teachers and administrators often think that permanent, systemic, and sustained improvement is unlikely.

Second, the existing norm of improvement suggests that only those who have a high level of current experience in the classroom really understand how to improve practice. There are few who believe that those with less experience, but with a wide range of knowledge, might be effective in designing improvements to classroom practice.

Third, the lack of differentiated recognition in the teaching profession provides little structure for recognizing teachers who become experts of practice and show high levels of effectiveness with diverse student populations. Administration, on the other hand, is highly differentiated despite the fact that this differentiation has little to do with the core mission of the system. Elmore argued that districts must redefine roles that are more aligned with the critical tasks of school and system improvement of learning.

Fourth, the design of schools and systems is incompatible with the notion of improvement. Teachers spend too much time in isolation, without opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues. The norm of the organization suggests that if teachers spend time away from their direct teaching duties to collaborate, then they are often considered not working. These beliefs send clear messages that the system is not interested in teachers working together to improve student learning and that observing and working with others is not what they are being paid to do. The disconnect described here seriously undermines any opportunity for sustained improvement by staff who see themselves as professionals

Last, many schools possess ineffective internal accountability systems resulting in the staff assigning responsibility for their success or failure on parents, the community, and the district. Elmore (2002) argued, “the historic absence of clear guidance for schools around issues of performance and accountability has spawned an extensive and resilient culture of passivity” (p.30).

Strategic plans for systemic improvement must address the issues identified by Elmore and others. Cultural norms have long influenced the success or lack of success of improvement initiatives. If districts strategically plan to address such issues directly within the context of clear district leadership, then schools and their staffs will demonstrate improved responses to the accountability for student learning and the improved classroom instruction required to produce that learning. Furthermore, district leadership will learn to alter structures and resource allocation in ways that will support a culture change in individual schools. Many of the essential issues that Elmore highlighted for sustained improvement are under the control and authority of districts and not individual schools. Many of these are policy-related issues under direct authority of the superintendent, executive staff, or Board of Education. To what extent do current district leaders consider taking action within these cultural or normative areas?

The literature on school reform clearly describes a more active leadership role for districts. By reviewing and analyzing the strategies used by some district leaders across the country, an opportunity to define possible district actions for improvement exists. Given the growing concern about the state of schools in providing for school improvement, districts that ignore the message are at risk.

District-Reform Case Studies

A review of the literature demonstrates that districts have become an important unit for change. A review of sample case studies revealed the theoretical basis for this increased focus on district involvement in reform initiatives. Examining sample case studies informs our thinking about the role that district leadership plays in supporting and sustaining reform over time. Systemic district reform initiatives are reviewed in this chapter. The districts are: (a) New York City Community School District #2; (b) The Philadelphia Story, *Children Achieving*, 1994 – 2001; (c) San Diego's School Reform, and; (d) Learning First Alliance - Kent County Public Schools and Minneapolis Public Schools.

Community School District #2: New York City

Between 1993 and 1997 there were growing concerns about the capacity of local districts to produce and sustain improvements in the schools of this country. These concerns evidenced themselves in the form of lack of proof that districts played a constructive role in instructional improvement, thus increasing criticism of local boards and administrators, increasing patterns of governmental by-pass of local districts within the testing and accountability improvement context, and concerns about the structures used by whole school reform entrepreneurs to bypass local districts and work only with schools. With this emerging pattern, questions arose about what would become of local district leadership roles.

With this question as a focus in the mid 1990s, the CPRE and the Center on Restructuring Schools provided Elmore and Burney (1997) a grant to study New York City District #2. This district was attempting to provide leadership using professional

development as a strategy to improve instruction. The researchers described “concrete strategies that districts can use to mobilize knowledge in the service of instructional improvement” (p. 3). They identified practices in District #2 that could be generalized to other districts across the country as they attempt to systemically improve instruction.

At that time, District #2 was led by Superintendent Anthony Alvarado. The district estimated that about 50% of the teachers were replaced in the eight years of his tenure. During the same period, Alvarado and his staff replaced 20 out of 30 principals in the system. Alvarado believed that in order for a decentralized strategy of instructional improvement to work, and in order for principals to accept the demand that management equals the improvement of instruction, the administration had to select and retain principals with demonstrated aptitude for, and agreement with, the district’s systemic reform strategy (Elmore & Burney, 1997). As a result, one component of the district’s strategy was recruitment of principals who fit this description. The strategy further attempted to develop future leadership personnel within the district, and develop a culture and norms that dictated that principals attend staff development with their teachers and accept responsibility for institutionalization of improved instructional practices within their schools. Elmore and Burney (1997) concluded that Alvarado saw “the principalship as the linchpin of his systemic strategy and he recognized that if he can’t influence who becomes a principal in the system, he can’t decentralize and get the results he wants” (p. 23).

The analysis of the New York City District #2 case by Elmore and Burney revealed other elements of the systemic instructional improvement strategy. District leaders acknowledged that they did not view these elements in the cohesive fashion set

forth by the researchers. Elmore and Burney observed that the district leaders, superintendent and executive staff:

. . . view the strategy as a loosely connected, constantly evolving set of activities held together by a single common theme of instructional improvement. They don't see themselves as executing a prescribed plan, but rather as pursuing a complex set of possibilities related to the theme of instructional improvement. All of the major activities are in a constant state of flux – new content areas get added, consultants shift in and out of particular schools, proposals get made for new activities, new themes get added on to the agenda. (p. 21)

The strategy did not “spring full-blown from Alvarado’s head” (p.21). Rather, Alvarado began with a loosely conceived idea about improving instruction through a focus on professional development. Most of the actions taken by the district were neither conceived nor anticipated by Alvarado at the beginning. Most actions came from the creativity of other people in response to his challenge.

Elmore and Burney (1997) identified a number of key elements to Alvarado’s reform strategy. First, Alvarado set clear expectations and then decentralized. Second, efforts were made to encourage everyone to take risks by fostering collegiality, caring, and respect. The district created a professional development model that included a professional development lab, use of outside consulting services – the external expert, and inter-visitation and peer networks inside and outside of District #2. Finally, and most important, were routine yearly oversight visits to schools by the superintendent, with additional visits to schools encountering problems by the assistant superintendent (for instruction).

In considering the leadership actions taken by District #2 during Alvarado’s eight year tenure, Elmore and Burney (1997) reported that Alvarado worried:

. . . that the District #2 approach to instructional improvement might be viewed by outsiders as a collection of managerial principles, rather than as a culture based on norms of commitment, mutual care, and concern. . . He also worries that emphasizing managerial principles at the expense of organizational culture makes

it appear that district administrators can change practice, when, in fact, the process of changing practice has to originate with teachers, students, administrators, and parents working out difficult problems together in a web of shared expectations. The effectiveness of district-level management, he argued, was determined by the level of commitment and mutual support among those responsible for instruction. (p. 11)

Elmore questioned whether the success experienced by District #2 was the result of district action or the result of effective responses by school-based administration to the accountability challenge of the superintendent. Another view suggested that the focus on professional development, with its multiple prescribed facets, paired with the consistent achievement expectations provided a consistent structure to the district policy leadership. Elmore and Burney (1997) believed that one important lesson for other districts to take from this case study is that the phased implementation of change initiatives allows staff to adjust to the change.

Elmore also concluded that as an instrument of system-wide instructional improvement, professional development was useful in other districts regardless of context similarities and differences. The study of the multifaceted professional development model used in District #2 found that people in the district learned how to formulate an improvement initiative to effectively change classroom instructional practice. The lessons learned early in the District #2's change initiative set in motion a process for making changes in teaching practice that applied in later initiatives.

Elmore and Burney (1997) found that Alvarado also emphasized the role of the communicative messages sent by him and his executive staff. "We tried to model with our words and behavior a consuming interest in teaching and learning, almost to the exclusion of everything else. And we expect principals to model the same behavior with the teachers in their schools" (p. 7). His observation highlighted the importance of maintaining balance between central district authority and school-site autonomy. Elmore

and Burney stressed the fine line Alvarado and his team had to walk. They exerted discipline and focus on district-wide instructional priorities, while encouraging principals and teachers to take initiative in devising their own strategies for improvement at the school site. Elmore and Burney (1997) stated that this approach suggests, “there is no such thing as a wholly ‘centralized’ or wholly ‘decentralized’ strategy for systemic instructional improvement. Any systemic strategy has to involve discipline and focus at the center, and a relatively high degree of discretion within certain parameters in the schools” (p. 23). Some consistent strategy must serve as the glue that holds the arrangement together. This balance requires that district leadership be comfortable about exercising control in areas that are central to the success of the strategy.

Alvarado viewed highlighting professional development within the budget document as a formalized component of his strategy. He aspired to have the Board of Education commit to spending an identified percentage of the budget on professional development each year. Because the actual cost of the strategy exceeded 3% of the budget, the district leadership staff engaged in “multi-pocketed budgeting.” This budgeting strategy consisted of orchestrating multiple sources of revenue around a single priority to produce maximum revenue. This approach has also been described as “functional budgeting” of multiple revenue sources.

The results of the District #2 instructional improvement initiative were inconsistent across schools. As Elmore and Burney concluded their study of the district, further work and changes for lagging schools were planned. The responses of school principals to the District #2 change initiative varied. Several principals described it as “hearing footsteps.” Principals were uniformly aware of the expectation that they orchestrate professional development for their staff and that they prioritize district

strategies within their schools. Some principals believed that some schools were under more scrutiny than others. A collegial relationship of coaching developed between experienced principals and new principals. Principals reported feeling challenged by district staff about the instructional practices of some of their teaching staff. This criticism was viewed at times as unfair. The visitation *walk-throughs* were generally viewed as constructive and strongly influenced how principals planned and viewed their work. Principals indicated that they felt strong pressure to perform. They expressed the feeling of being under greater pressure than their colleagues in other districts.

In determining their strategy, District #2 avoided focusing on select schools in favor of deliberately expanding the numbers of teachers and principals introduced to new practices. This strategy required that the district stay focused on a limited number of objectives for improved practice, and that the district's leadership justify the expense of the selected initiative. As teachers, principals, board members and extended policy makers began to understand the sustained attention required for systemic improvement, the knowledge was developed to ask harder questions about whether the cost of the initiative was justified in terms of improved student learning. Stability of focus over time was needed. This demanded that leadership buffer the district from external influences and pressures that made it difficult to stay focused.

Elmore and Burney concluded that the District #2 case provided compelling evidence that local districts play an active and influential role in the improvement of instruction in classrooms across their districts. While District #2 chose staff development as the consistent strategy to bind the systemic improvement initiative, others might select different strategies, yet achieve similar natural advantages that districts possess in supporting sustained instructional improvements. The natural advantages identified in

this case study included the economies of scale in acquiring consultant services and the introduction of strong incentives for principals and teachers to pay attention to the improvement of teaching as identified in the improvement initiative. Other advantages included district created opportunities for interaction among professionals that schools might not be able to facilitate by themselves, and the creative use of multi-pocketed budgeting to generate resources for focusing on the identified instructional improvement strategy.

From Elmore's early work on district leadership, lessons were learned about the thinking that occurred by district leaders, superintendent, and executive staff to determine appropriate actions and strategies in support of improved student achievement. In District #2 Alvarado determined that the staff in place upon his arrival did not possess the capacity or commitment to achieve the desired results. This decision suggested that he engaged in a process of identifying the root cause of performance concerns. Strategies to address and remediate the root cause were also generated, suggesting a need for a strong district leadership skill of problem solution generation.

The most significant impact of the work of Elmore (1993) and later Elmore and Burney (1997) in District #2 was the emphasis and attention it brought to the role of the district in providing leadership and coherence to improvements in instructional practice in all classrooms of the district. Elmore and Burney argued that what a district did influenced the capacity of the individual school's ability to improve.

Elmore applied findings from the 1997 Elmore and Burney case study of New York City District # 2 to his later attempts to identify the most promising school improvement strategies. Primary focus was placed on the need to build the capacity of

district leadership, school-level administrators, and teachers through systemic implementation of job-embedded professional development.

Sustained improvement requires that specific information about district priorities be clearly and publicly articulated by the district leadership. This message must also align with the overall purposes and standards by which performance will be judged. Any system of accountability and improvement must relate the particularities of the context to the overall demands being made on the school district. Elmore argued that school districts must avoid the “add on mentality” that increased funds would automatically improve teacher and administrator capacity and performance. This view confuses the cause and effect elements of the debate. If school districts understood the importance of professional development to their overall staff performance, then a coherent, targeted, systemic professional development program would already be in place. As stated earlier, Elmore (2000) argued that districts with such programs are rare, thus reinforcing his view that districts lacked the capacity and structures to improve and to support equitable improvement of all schools in the district.

The Philadelphia Story

The Philadelphia reform work was conducted by a combined team of school district leaders and external partners. One external partner was the Annenberg Foundation, although it provided partial funding, it also required a funding match, and an external oversight management structure to provide program, fiscal, and evaluation oversight of the grant work. In this case, a local business group, Greater Philadelphia First, assumed several roles. These roles included both the challenge of working with the school system and of building and sustaining civic support for the improvement initiative. Corcoran and Christman (2002) reported that the conceptual framework in the

Philadelphia reform initiative held that “if districts and states set academic standards for student performance; align standards; measure students’ progress; and offer rewards or sanctions to educators based on performance, then school staffs will make the changes in their practice necessary to ensure that students achieve at high levels” (p. v). The Center for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) and Research for Action (RFA) served as the external evaluators of the Philadelphia initiative.

At the time of the study, the Philadelphia School District served 215,000 students, most of who lived in poverty (Corcoran & Christman, 2002). Eighty percent of the students were minorities and less than 50% of those entering ninth grade graduated four years later. At the time of the study, David Hornbeck had been recruited as Superintendent of Schools by a combined business, civic, and governmental group of leaders. Dr. Hornbeck came with his own “conceptual framework,” which included:

Given high academic standards and strong incentives to focus their efforts and resources; more control over school resource allocations, organization, policies, and programs; adequate funding and resources; more hands-on leadership and high-quality support; better coordination of resources and programs; schools restructured to support good teaching and encourage improvement of practice; rich professional development of their own choosing and increased public understanding and support; the teachers and administrators of the Philadelphia schools will develop, adopt, or adapt instructional technologies and patterns of behavior that will help all children reach the district’s high standards. (p.1)

This new leadership in the district, along the receipt of a major grant from Anneberg, caused a great deal of optimism. It was believed that these two occurrences could create fiscal support for needed reforms. As a component of the beginning of the reform initiative, *Children Achieving*, Hornbeck developed a ten-point plan for improvement and set goals for reaching the standards that were to be achieved within twelve years.

According to Corcoran & Christman (2002), Hornbeck’s ten-point plan included:

1. Set high expectations for all students – so that every child gets the ‘basics’ and a lot more.

2. Set standards to measure the results of reforms and use these measures to hold educators accountable.
3. Shrink the centralized bureaucracy and let schools make more decisions.
4. Provide intensive and sustained training to staff so they can meet the tough challenges ahead.
5. Make sure all students are healthy and ready to learn.
6. Provide students with the community support and services they need to succeed in school.
7. Provide up-to-date technology: one computer for every six students, books, and clean and safe schools.
8. Engage the public in understanding, supporting, and participating in school reform.
9. Ensure adequate financial and other resources, and use them effectively.
10. Be prepared to address all these priorities together; all at once, and for the long term – starting now. (p. 2)

Increases in achievement were noted during the first five years of *Children Achieving*. CPRE and RFA reported that the improvements in test scores under Hornbeck's leadership could be attributed to the test preparation that occurred and the increasing familiarity with the test format and content. This same pattern was reported to occur in other states and school districts where a new test was introduced – an initial low level performance followed by gradual improvement prior to leveling off. Thus, questions were asked about whether any changes really occurred in Philadelphia. When test scores were released each year there were celebrations and rewards; however, the civic and governmental leaders gradually lost hope and their support waned due to the high percentage of students who were still below basic. These leaders had expected quick-paced systemic improvements and their dissatisfaction grew when their expectations were not met. This highlights the need to come to agreement on a level of performance that is expected over a defined period of time. As reported earlier, Hornbeck set a goal of achieving standards within twelve years. The improvement achieved over the five year period left civic and governmental leaders doubting that the goal would be met based on the rate of improvement seen.

Foley (2001) stated that Hornbeck based his systemic improvement program on eight strategies: (a) fair funding; (b) standards; (c) accountability; (d) decentralization; (e) leadership and support; (f) better coordination of resources; (g) civic and parent engagement; and (h) doing it all at once. These strategies were not all successful for Hornbeck. Several of the strategies provide insight into the decisions that must be made by districts in designing systemic improvement initiatives and defining the role of the district in their implementation.

First, the struggle to build support for the fiscal resources needed to sustain the Philadelphia initiative after the Annenberg funding ended became a struggle between state and city leaders. The responsibility of adequate funding for schools and the debate that it was the state's responsibility overwhelmed the discussions about the instructional needs of students. Corcoran and Christman (2002) argued that "the entire reform effort in Philadelphia can be viewed as a calculated risk by Superintendent Hornbeck that he could secure additional funds for the district in time to sustain the reforms before the Annenberg challenge grant ran out" (p. 9). The identification of resources prior to initiation of the program should be considered so that strategies and benchmarks can be mutually agreed upon knowing the level of fiscal support.

Second, the strategy of decentralization, moving most decision-making back to the schools, did not truly describe what played out during program implementation. Corcoran and Christman (2002) reported that Hornbeck communicated early and often the central tenet that "those who sit closest to the action are in the best position to decide what mix of resources . . . will most effectively accomplish the goal of raising student achievement" (p. 17). From the outset, both the central office staff and the school-based staff struggled to understand and implement new roles, relationships, and structures.

Defining a method of operating with a *hands off* approach, while attempting to be supportive in building capacity and in monitoring and assessing progress, was difficult. School-based personnel found the decentralization to be burdensome on the schools, which were not ready to assume so much responsibility. Time and the capacity to become familiar with the standards-based curriculum were overwhelming (Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Foley, 2001). As Foley (2001) stated, “because the decision to decentralize was made centrally, and designed with little consultation with the field, school and cluster personnel experienced ‘decentralization’ as a set of central mandates” (p. 9). The lack of access or capacity to provide substantive professional development prevented the schools from being ready to carry out their new duties.

In 1998, three years into the program, district leadership determined that scores were not improving and that the district needed to send stronger messages to schools about what and how to teach. The district was then organized into regional clusters as a means of communication across the district. This strategy, however, produced in mixed results due to the variable capacity of cluster leadership. Struggles about whether the principal was evaluated by the cluster leader caused the clusters to be viewed as another rung on the bureaucratic hierarchy.

The implementation of small learning communities (SLC) for students and teachers was also viewed as a means to decentralize. According to Corcoran & Christman (2002), the CPRE/RFA data revealed important findings with regard to the impact of SLCs:

- 1) well-implemented SLCs were positively associated with a school climate conducive to effective teaching, and 2) SLCs were positively associated with teacher perceptions of the strength of their professional community (a measure of

teacher collaboration and shared responsibility for student learning); 3) SLCs made a direct contribution to positive learning outcomes for students; 4) elementary schools were more positive about the impact of SLCs than middle or high schools; 5) qualitative data indicate that SLCs contributed to safer, more orderly school environments at all levels; and 6) the impact of SLCs on school climate was greater than the impact on curriculum and instruction. (p. 20)

The final finding reported may have been due to the assignment of disciplinary and administrative responsibilities to the SLC.

Overall the CPRE/RFA researchers argued that the Philadelphia story suggests that the plan was undone by the lack of resources, the lack of true understanding of what it takes to change schools, by poor implementation, and by the lack of group members willingness to work together for children (Corcoran & Christman, 2002). The CPRE/RFA groups remind us that this initiative repeated the mistakes that were made in many other district reform initiatives. The focus on content standards and accountability only work if teachers were provided the time to understand the curriculum standards and work together on quality classroom methods. Intensive, sustained curriculum-based professional development is necessary for classroom practice to change. Teacher talent must be distributed equally if equity is to be achieved across the district. This can only be achieved through the enactment of system policies for hiring, teacher retention, and teacher transfers.

Hornbeck outlined multiple strategies and goals with specified timelines and a “do it all at once” approach. Foley (2001) labeled this “reform overload” or “innovation overload” (p. 21). Additionally, Foley believed that the district cluster staff that tried to support school staff was hampered by too many initiatives and directives they had to

implement. CPRE/RFA suggested that a better approach was to focus on a few changes at once, understanding that if teachers saw improvements and felt more successful, they would push to take the next steps and support additional changes (Corcoran & Christman, 2002). When focusing on fewer changes at once, district leadership must recognize that different strategies are needed for middle and high schools. The developmental aspects of student learning are not appropriate for high schools, thus modified approaches to assessing improvements are needed.

The structural and reporting changes defined for the system resulted in the need to prepare all employees for the redefined roles, relationships, and responsibilities. Central to all aspects of the reform agenda was the problem of who decided which aspects of the reform. The balance between central and local decision-making caused a lot of confusion (Foley, 2001).

Foley (2001) described three elements of capacity that must be addressed in designing systemic district reform: (a) District leadership must ensure that financial resources are allocated to staffing, time, and materials; (b) District leadership must ensure that human capital, or the commitment, disposition and knowledge of district staff are addressed; and (c) District leadership must focus on social capital, or the relationships among school district staff that create (or hinder the creation) of positive group norms, such as collaboration, trust, etc.

Two critical issues were identified relative to implementation of the reform model outlined by Hornbeck. First, there was a perceived rush to implementation without regard for the need to carefully plan the sequence and rollout of the reform elements. Teachers and administrators complained that they were held accountable before the appropriate capacity building took place. Second, there was a serious underestimation of

the time and effort needed to successfully implement the reform and improve student achievement as required. The sense of urgency resulted from the hiring of the new superintendent, the passionate desire to improve achievement, and the fear of the state taking over the district.

Significant lessons were learned from the analysis of sample school district reform experiences. Hornbeck's experience in Philadelphia and Alvarado's experience in District #2 allow for reflection on the questions raised by Elmore (1997) in his discussion of how a district positions itself within the current multiple level governance structures of education. The actions of district leadership reflect the instructional priorities set for the district and available resources allocated to schools and teachers reflect district leadership priorities. Any full analysis of district reform actions should address these issues.

Elmore also queried what external policies placed pressure on instructional matters and how district leaders responded to such pressures. He argued that considering such questions defined the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for the superintendent and key senior district leadership staff. Both Hornbeck and Alvarado faced such issues and were strongly influenced by them in defining key strategies for reform.

These two district case studies demonstrate that some actions taken by districts are effective and others are not. Hornbeck lacked a strategy to analyze and confront the external environmental contextual factors facing him. Political and financial challenges served to collapse the Philadelphia initiative under Hornbeck. The long-range progress of New York District #2 reminds us that short-term progress, even good progress, must be further examined in terms of trends. While the report of these district initiatives describes the primary strategies utilized by the superintendents and their senior

leadership, the case studies on these districts are silent on descriptions of specific actions taken.

San Diego's School Reform

Darling-Hammond, Hightower, Husbands, LaFors, and Young (2002) examined the “nested interactions of several sets of policies that target teachers and instruction at all levels . . . by discussing system reform in an embedded state and district context – San Diego, California” (p. 1). Darling-Hammond et al. studied the major school reform initiatives implemented in San Diego in response to the state standards-based reform initiative that includes a testing and accountability component. At the time the district of San Diego, California, was the second largest district in the state, comprised of 142,300 students and 7, 400 teachers in 180 schools. The student population was extremely diverse with approximately one-third of the students being Latino, one-fourth Caucasian, one-fifth African-American, and the remainder Asian or other. Sixty percent of the students qualified for free or reduced meals and 30% were English language learners.

In 1998, San Diego launched a major reform initiative at the beginning of the tenure of what was viewed by some as a joint superintendency. Alan Bersin, a lawyer, became the Superintendent of Public Education, employing Anthony Alvarado, formally the Superintendent of District #2 in New York City, as the Chancellor of Instruction. The reform initiative focused on “establishing a professional accountability system, concentrating all decision making on the quality of teaching, creating an infrastructure of reforms to improve the knowledge and skills of all personnel, and instituting a tightly coupled instructional change process . . .” (p. 10).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) noted that several key elements of the initiative included setting high level student achievement standards, evaluating student

performance both from a formative and summative basis, establishing small learning communities (SLC) to build on the belief that when interaction between students and teachers is improved, student learning improves. Other key elements of the initiative were increasing teacher knowledge and classroom practice, thus professionalizing teaching, and focusing on the professional development of teachers. This was believed to occur through teacher interaction and reflection networks, on-site coaching, and prioritized school-based leadership focus on instruction. The co-leadership team instituted a change process that was:

highly directive, prioritizing speed of implementation and fidelity of the instructional theory over mechanisms to solicit input and ensure backing from organizational members about the changes underway . . . this approach counters views of incrementalism . . . Leaders' theory of change centered around the belief that systemic, instructional reform in an entrenched district system must begin with a boom . . . including the destruction of many pre-existing structures, culture, and norms... (p. 15)

To accomplish this reform, the San Diego School Board passed a major policy package codifying the new uses of funding, substantially decreasing school-based autonomy in expenditures, while centrally providing funding for research-based strategies to improve teaching and learning across the district. The district established a content focus on the development of literacy, which was viewed as the gateway skill.

Principals responded positively to the changes despite the acknowledgement of centralizing many things. They appreciated their Instructional Leader, the Learning Community Groupings, the opportunities to collaborate and reflect with peers at monthly Principals' Conferences, and the feedback from the "Walk Throughs" as sources of

professional growth and inspiration. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2002), overall district support of school reform efforts was rated on principal surveys as follows:

Table 2.1 Principals' View of San Diego Reforms

Survey Data 2000-2001			
<u>% Rating Item Highly Valuable</u>	<u>Elementary (%)</u>	<u>Middle (%)</u>	<u>High (%)</u>
Principals' Learning Communities	96	69	54
Monthly Principals' Conferences	89	70	46
Discussions w/Principals in Learning Communities	93	50	46
Overall District Support of School Reform Efforts	83	67	78

From Building Instructional Quality: Inside-out, bottom-up and top-down perspectives on San Diego's School Reform, by L. Hammond-Darling, et al. Copyright 2002.

During interviews principals also expressed feelings of being over-worked and fearful of pressures and consequences for those in their positions because of school performance accountability expectations. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2002), teacher reactions described the reforms as “too cut-throat, top-down,” and “bureaucratic” (p. 36). Furthermore, they found that most teachers agreed with the goals of the reform, yet objected to the lack of consideration of their views. As a result of the negative feedback regarding teacher and principal input, year four of the reform brought a change which adopted more collaborative approaches to school improvement.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) stressed that the San Diego reform initiative attempted to implement tight district control of standards of fiscal resource allocation, achievement expectations, processes of teaching and learning, and professional development. While these bureaucratic, top-down strategies were implemented, schools and their principals were asked to solve problems at the school level. This reform initiative opens the dialogue about which decisions should be made at the top, what will be district controlled and standardized, and what can be flexible for schools to adapt in their settings. These decisions impact the degree to which schools within a district

provide a uniform system of education and function as *one system of schools* verses *individual schools*. The decisions made in this area by district leadership will influence the equity of services provided to students across the district.

Learning First Alliance Case Study: Kent County, Maryland

The Learning First Alliance (LFA) was interested in documenting information about how districts facing high levels of poverty improved student learning. Toward that end, the organization studied five high poverty school districts across the country that demonstrated a pattern of improved achievement over time. According to Tongeri and Anderson (2003), districts were selected on specific identified criteria: (a) increased student achievement in math and/or reading over three or more years; (b) improvement in student achievement across racial, ethnic, and grade level groups; (c) a poverty rate of greater than 25% as defined by free and reduced meal participation; and (d) a reputation of effective professional development practices, based on recommendation from educational leaders. Although five districts were studied in detail, this paper reviews only two: Minneapolis, Minnesota and Kent County, Maryland – the largest and smallest districts in the study. The following summarizes their demographics:

Table 2.2 District Statistical Data: 2001-2002 School Year

Demographic	Kent County, MD	Minneapolis, MN
Per-pupil expenditure	\$8,000	\$10,854
Number of schools	8	128
Number of students	2,795	47,470
Students – White	70%	26%
Students – Black	27%	44%
Students – Hispanic	3%	11%
Students – Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino	0%	15%
Students – Native American/Alaskan Native	0%	4%
Free & Reduced Meal eligibility	8%	67%
English Language Learners	1%	24%
Number of Teachers (FTE)	179	3,629

Information summarized from LFA Report by Togneri & Anderson, 2003

Togneri and Anderson (2003) found that the Learning First Alliance focused on the following questions:

- 1) How did the districts create the will to begin instructional reform?
- 2) What strategies guided their reform efforts?
- 3) In what ways did districts change their approaches to professional development?
- 4) How did interactions among the stakeholders facilitate or hinder instructional reform? [and]
- 5) How was leadership distributed across stakeholders to facilitate improvement? (p. 1-2)

Kent County, the smallest district in its state, is situated on the Eastern Shore of Maryland's Chesapeake Bay. The district encompasses the entire county of Kent, with a population of 19,000 citizens. The 2,795 student enrollment of the district was relatively

stable at the time of the study. The standards and accountability movement in Kent County began with the state program of testing and accountability moving all systems in the state forward toward improved achievement. Dr. Lorraine Costella was employed as the Superintendent of Schools in the summer of 1994 with a mandate to increase the rigor of the curriculum and instruction and to improve achievement. Dr. Costella involved multiple stakeholder groups during a one-day strategic planning session that resulted in a defined vision, five goals, and clear direction for the district (Togneri & Lazarus, 2003).

The theory of change that guided the reform initiative set forth by Superintendent Costella combined a strong district support framework with school-level flexibility to adapt strategies to children in different buildings. The theory of change included:

- 1) sustaining focus around a few clear goals related to achievement and instruction; 2) implementing district-wide curriculum aligned to state standards and across grade levels; 3) distributing leadership across all stakeholders – board members, central office, principals, and teachers; 4) building networks of instructional experts – creating a corps of instruction-focused principals – creating a network of teacher leaders to extend instructional improvement capacity; 5) using data to make decisions at all levels of the system – from the student to the board; 6) creating a system of professional development that responds to data-revealed needs; and 7) continually learning, assessing, and readjusting practice. (p. 2)

Within a few years of Dr. Costella's arrival, Kent County rose to be the top performing district in Maryland and remained so for three years.

In addition to the strategies evident within the theory of change, Kent County also implemented a structure of a learning community emphasizing the Baldrige Framework, a nationally recognized framework for systemic reform and continuous improvement. Following the advice of one of the members of the Board of Education, Dr. Costella explored structures of systemic improvement. Kent County, along with four other counties, implemented a *Baldrige in Education* initiative to provide support to the concepts and processes of continuous improvement. Kent County realigned their

strategic plan and assigned a team to oversee each of the five goals. Multiple indicators suggest that Baldrige was actively implemented in Kent County as they began to “harness human capital . . . to get input from all” (Togneri & Lazarus, 2003, p. 7). Costella moved the Baldrige model of continuous improvement to the classroom through a *Baldrige in the Classroom* program, and permitted school-level implementation to be voluntary and not mandated. Allocation of fiscal resources was focused on strategic efforts and was managed by the superintendent and Board of Education; however, extensive grant support was needed and obtained to achieve goals. Dr. Costella cultivated relationships and communication with all stakeholders and visited all schools weekly to maintain focus (Togneri & Lazarus, 2003).

Like Bersin in San Diego, Costella began her program of professional development by having total district control over professional development content and schedules. Later, Costella loosened district reigns and developed a multiple stakeholder group to design professional development, the Professional Development Council. Ultimately five of the nine professional development days were released to the schools to determine their content and structure individually. Kent County provides a good example of a district that valued collaboration and provided some time for this to occur, furthering the effort by some schools adopting block scheduling to provide additional time within the school day. Despite these efforts, teachers expressed concerns that the efforts to promote collaboration infringed on time they typically used for their individual work. Lessons learned in this area include: (a) promoting collaboration takes time that must be provided during the teacher work day if it is to occur, and (b) the time alone will not create the cultural change needed to help teachers learn to collaborate, reflect, inquire, and plan together (Togneri & Lazarus, 2003).

One of the most striking aspects of the reform movement in Kent County was the focus on continuous learning, which was spread and modeled throughout the county.

Togneri and Lazarus (2003) cited another distinguishing feature as:

...the way in which district leaders used their own power to create cohesion among stakeholders throughout the district. Leaders determined the importance of creating a common vision and used a variety of district-driven processes and structures to develop and diffuse this vision. Most important, they developed mechanisms to distribute leadership throughout the system so that union leaders, principals, and teachers all played a significant role in creating and leading the reform. (p. 30)

The case study of Kent County, Maryland, reinforces the use of several change action strategies reported in other case studies in this chapter. New York District #2, San Diego and now Kent County included actions or strategies in their change work plan that utilized control of resource allocation, defining and communicating the vision, professional development or training to build capacity, defining the district's priorities and maintaining that focus on a few things, using data for multiple purposes, monitoring progress, and selecting a defined focus for the change. Only Kent County specifically tried to address a culture change.

Some of these action strategies were effective for the district leadership in promoting the desired change and some were not. It is uncertain why or how each action was selected and what its intended purpose was. Understanding the thinking of the leadership and getting a better understanding of the day to day decisions made would provide greater insight.

Learning First Alliance Case Study: Minneapolis, Minnesota

At the time of the Learning First Alliance (LFA) study, Minneapolis, Minnesota, had a K-12 student enrollment of 47,470 and a teacher corps of 4,658. The Minneapolis reform movement was not spurred by any single event or person, but rather from

pressures that came from the state testing and accountability movement and the local board, businesses, and government, who were beginning to lack confidence and considered reducing funding. In 1997, the district board hired a new superintendent, giving her a mandate to improve instruction and eliminate the achievement gaps.

The district already had a strategic plan, the District Improvement Agenda (DIA), when the new superintendent arrived; however, she parlayed this into a new document to fulfill her board assigned mandates, thus evolved the new DIA. The updated DIA was developed through the input of hundreds of stakeholders who attended multiple focus group meetings. Although the DIA set performance goals for all students, the board and community were very concerned about the achievement gaps. A specific plan, connected to the DIA, was developed and this new document became known as the *Twelve Point Plan* (Anderson & Togneri, 2003). Beginning in 1999, the district began to publish a semi-annual public report on the performance of the district. The document, *Measuring Up*, rated schools and the district on multiple performance indicators.

The district focused on several special initiatives in addition to curriculum alignment projects: (a) early literacy; (b) improvement in attendance; (c) middle school reform aimed at teaming, integrated curriculum, and flexible scheduling; (d) high school reform designed around small learning communities of interest clusters; (e) re-conceptualizing professional development stressing job-embedded professional development, increased collaboration, and the creation of staff development standards; and 6) increased use of data for all decisions made in the district.

The Minneapolis District developed a detailed assessment and accountability structure for their system. Monitoring progress was a key element of the reform design. The district also began to develop a new coherent curriculum “architecture” (Togneri &

Anderson, p. 7), which was distributed to teachers but not developed for deeper understanding for several years. Other district attention was given to a series of special initiatives, such as early literacy, attendance, and middle and high school reform. These appear to be massive initiatives, greatly complicating the potential attention that could be given to any one. Focus on select reform processes was not emphasized in Minneapolis, much like in Philadelphia.

In Minneapolis, the union played a key role in professional development. The superintendent and the union collaborated on the topics, schedule, and focus of professional development. There was also collaboration on how to deal with struggling teachers, many of whom were dismissed with the support of the union. Data reports for each school were distributed annually to each school on its performance and teachers were given information about how the school was progressing. A professional development process coordinator was employed by the district. In addition, each school had a professional development coordinator who received individual professional development plans from each teacher and coordinated the plan reviews with a review committee. These processes were codified in the teacher contract. This process of professional development is opposite that taken by most districts reviewed. The Minneapolis plan gives a great deal of freedom and trust in teacher professionalism. Teachers are required to attend 20 hours of defined training each year in addition to their time released for the work on their professional development plans.

The Minneapolis approach was to engage in district led development of the architecture of the reform components and then shift to school-based flexibility. The process of these changes was considered evolutionary and not revolutionary. The development of principal leadership capacity did not receive focused attention. Adequate

funding and adequate time for teachers to plan and problem solve remained as issues in 2003 when the report was printed.

The Minneapolis case study presents a less detailed and intrusive role for the district. The actions taken by the district were primarily structural and political in nature. The role of the union as collaborative partners is different than any other case review; however, the time issues for teachers remain a complaint that is identified in many districts.

Togneri and Anderson (2003) summarized the findings from the study of five district improvement initiatives, two of which have been included in this review - Kent County, Maryland, and Minneapolis Public Schools. Based on more than 200 individual interviews, 15 school visits, and 60 focus groups, the Learning First Alliance researchers found that the districts implemented a strikingly similar set of strategies to improve instruction. Togneri and Anderson (2003) wrote:

- 1) Districts had the courage to acknowledge poor performance and the will to seek solutions; 2) Districts put into place a system-wide approach to improving instruction, one that provided curricular content and provided support; 3) Districts instilled visions that focused on student learning and guided instructional improvement; 4) Districts made decisions based on data, not instinct; 5) Districts redefined leadership roles; 6) Districts adopted new approaches to professional development that involved a coherent and district organized set of strategies to improve instruction, and 7) Districts committed to sustaining reform over the long haul. (p. 4-5)

While the reform effort of each district reviewed thus far set forth district strategies for improvement, it is important to remember that simultaneously the schools and districts also utilized other strategies for improved performance.

Lessons Learned from Case Studies

The purpose of reviewing district case studies is to determine lessons learned that might inform the thinking and leadership of school districts as they attempt to meet the

requirements of AYP. A review of the history of school reform efforts emphasizes that the focused unit of improvement has moved beyond the school to include the district. The emphasis on the need for district leadership to play a key role in leading initiatives to improve classroom practice and thus student learning resulted from the work of Elmore (1997), Foley (2001), Massell (2000), and Togneri and Anderson (2003). One important role for the district in school system reform is the need for districts to ensure coherence, focus, and systems thinking when designing district and school improvement initiatives. Although the role of districts in system reform has changed and the stakes for school districts have escalated as a result of *NCLB*, the goal of improving student achievement remains the same. McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) stated:

A reforming district takes *itself* as the focus of change and has a clear theory of change for the system. . . . Focusing on the system means that all schools and all elements of the district's policy environment . . . are explicitly included in the reform agenda and strategic planning. (p. 10)

McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) offered a different perspective than that which operated during the 1990s. They joined a number of growing researchers who argued that what districts do matters fundamentally to what goes on in the classrooms across the district. This is not teacher-by-teacher change or school-by-school change, but a single direction set forth by the district with everyone in schools and central office being united around that shared vision and direction. The district defines prescribed forms of relationships with leadership personnel developing shared norms and reform practice across the school system in all schools and offices.

The collaborative nature of the teachers' professional community within a school repeatedly emerges as a significant factor in instructional improvement (Knapp et al., 2003b, McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003b). McLaughlin and Talbert concluded that:

The level of district professionalism and support for reform goals (average teacher ratings over the four year period) significantly predicts positive *change in* teachers' ratings of school conditions promoted by the reform. . . The results show that information on district reform support is as useful in predicting school reform outcomes in 2001 as is information on the school culture four years earlier. (p. 8)

Teachers identified assistance with inquiry and evidence-based decision-making and increased collaboration around curriculum development as the most important forms of district support. These types of supports were evident in districts that were characterized by the following conditions: (a) a systemic approach to reform; (b) a learning community at the central office level; (c) coherent focus on teaching and learning; (d) a stance of supporting professional learning and instructional improvement; and (e) data-based inquiry and accountability. These must all be implemented with the district being the unit of change.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) stated that in "a reforming district the central office administrators are continually working to improve their support of professional learning throughout the district and to effectively respond to schools' particular needs" (p. 13). Reforming districts are focused as a system on instruction. The coherence of that focus comes from the common principles that are being emphasized in all schools and the common strategies that are being presented in job-embedded professional learning opportunities. Reforming districts seek out and present cutting edge practices within the structure of their professional development and allocate resources that allow that focus to occur in all schools equally.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) found that the typical myths that are blamed for the failure of districts to produce leadership for successful school reform can be set aside when the district intentionally designs a district reform initiative that meets the characteristics set forth above. The reform elements evident in the case studies reviewed

suggest aspects of a conceptual framework that provides a basis on which to examine the issues surrounding the improvement of student achievement within the context of *NCLB*. Two critical elements of school reform evident in all case studies preceding *NCLB* were the establishment of student standards and the communication of those standards to all stakeholders, particularly the instructional staff of a district (Applebaum, 2002; Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Foley, 2001; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Also consistent within the pre-*NCLB* case studies was the determination of measurement standards and methodologies for those standards (Applebaum, 2002; Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Foley, 2001; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). These two key elements maintain their importance post-*NCLB*; however, both are integrated into the requirements of the law and its central concept of AYP.

Evident in all case studies reviewed was the key strategy of developing the capacity of the district staff through a focus on professional development. The work of Alvarado in both District #2 (Elmore, 1993, 1997) and San Diego (Elmore & Burney, 1997) was critical to the findings of these researchers that capacity building through professional development was central to the achievement of improved student learning. In many of the case studies reviewed one content area was identified as the focus of the capacity building/professional development efforts during the initial phases of the reform initiative (Corcoran, 2003; Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Elmore, 1993; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Although the identification of a single subject focus was not motivating to all instructional staff, particularly secondary teachers, the strategy did focus the professional development and capacity building efforts of the district leadership. The lesson learned from this strategy is that district leadership must

focus the district's capacity building efforts thus defining decision parameters for the distribution and allocation of resources.

The strategy of focusing on a single subject also served to provide coherence to the reform efforts within the district and focused the communication strategies and messages that the district leadership sent to instructional and leadership staff. This provided a central focus on learning to the conceptual framework as well as providing a platform for the communication of the vision and beliefs of the district leadership.

Evident throughout the case studies reviewed was the importance of the process of collaboration and joint learning. This element of the conceptual framework was more clearly defined through the district leadership's efforts to develop opportunities for collaborative learning and learning within small learning communities for staff (Applebaum, 2002; Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Foley, 2001; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Finding Direction

Knapp, Copland, Ford, Markholt, McLaughlin, and Talbert (2003b) recognized the issues faced by district leadership struggling to provide powerful and equitable learning opportunities for all students. Following a review of the literature on systemic improvement, these theorists developed a framework that was intended to guide district leadership in developing coherence in strategic actions. Coherence has multiple applications to district contexts. First, it refers to alignment among and between the activities intended to be carried out for achievement of learning objectives. The more aligned these actions, the more coherent the efforts. Second, coherence concerns the goal of alignment of the actions and strategies as they connect to communicate a compelling

vision of teaching and learning that teachers understand and accept. Finally, coherence implies a working consensus so that teachers' efforts to improve the achievement of students are consistent with efforts and strategies implemented by other teachers on the team, consistent with teachers in other grades, and are consistent with teachers in other schools across the district. Knapp et al. (2003a, 2003b) argued that coherence is ultimately about sense making. Do the strategies and efforts being implemented make sense and receive the support of all involved in the improvement initiative? Strategies outlined by Knapp et al. (2003b) for achieving coherence included:

- 1) communicating persistently with schools and across central offices about learning and the agenda for improvement; 2) making expert staff available to the schools to help with focused improvement efforts; 3) restructuring the district professional development function; 4) developing data that provides information about student learning that can be used to guide the development of professional study; and 5) allocating resources consistently in support of student and professional learning goals. (p. 41)

Knapp et al. (2003a, 2003b) highlighted the need for district leadership to persistently focus all district and school efforts on learning. In addition to the attention districts need to give to overall coherence of the reform, districts also need to consider the challenges that leadership face in determining specific actions and strategies to utilize within the reform initiative, the need to define who would make what decisions regarding the actions to be taken, the importance of determining which strategies will have the greatest influence on changing what teachers and learners do, and the need to analyze barriers that stand in the way of the improvements planned and sought. Knapp et al. (2003b) suggested "school and district leaders' ability to imagine constructive answers to these questions depends on their understanding of existing and potential connections between leading and learning" (p. 8). Leaders need to reflect, analyze existing challenges, and determine strategies for action. Leaders must be able to "visualize ways

to move forward” (p. 8). “Leadership can be thought of as the act of imparting purpose to an organization as well as motivating and sustaining effort in pursuit of that purpose” (p. 13). Knapp et al. (2003b) supported a broader view of leadership that included both the leadership tools defined by policy and law for those in formal leadership positions (sanctions, rewards, policy development, and implementation), but also the tools such as modeling, relationship building, and systemic inquiry.

Knapp et al. (2003b) also argued that the learning of three distinct entities were inter-related - students, teachers as professional staff, and the district/system. Each was shaped by the others and by the educational context and environment in which they operate. Thus, educational leaders must see the “points of connection and mutual influence” (p. 17). They suggested that:

- The nature of learning and teaching becomes input to professional learning, which, in turn, guides improvements in the classroom . . .
- Activities in the classroom and in professional learning venues become input to system learning, which, in turn, can influence the other two learning agendas . . .
- All three agendas are both constrained and enriched by the environments in which they sit. (p. 17)

This is a normative model that says that if you have leadership that recognizes and addresses the multiple, interdependent influences described, then you have the potential to achieve powerful, equitable learning results. Within this model of “leading for learning,” (Knapp, et al., 2003, p. *i*) is the concept that leaders take concrete steps that result in improved student, professional/teacher, and district learning. Thus, leaders do have the power to exert direct influence on learning of all involved.

Knapp et al. (2003b) argued that district leadership exerts leverage over learning in different ways depending on the nature of the environments in which they operate. District leaders are required to “grapple in contrasting ways with the task of forging

collective will, building a high-quality teaching force, and balancing discretion and initiative across levels” (p. 55). The success of the district leadership’s efforts is dependent, in part, on their ability to recognize opportunities for action in complex and adverse conditions. The case studies conducted by the researchers suggest that leaders responded to challenging circumstances by “finding or creating a catalyst for change, a glimmer of possibility, or they simply refused to submit to continued failure” (p.63). What happened in the district cases studied by Knapp et al. “underscores the need for gradually building strategies that coherently connect a range of activities in support of learning” (p.63).

Elmore (2002), Knapp et al. (2003a and b), and Massell (2000) all described the critical role of district leadership in creating and sustaining a focus on instructional improvement. The challenge of effective district leadership includes the creative and analytic identification of the needs of the system and the alignment of those needs with an identified focused lever on which to build the district strategic plan, and determining when and how to act. Some of the essential tasks of district leaders include actions that engage external environments that impact on teaching and learning. According to Knapp et al. (2003a), these tasks include making efforts to involve community, political, and environmental actors that influence instruction, building relationships with individuals and groups that need to support aspects of the district strategies for improvement and with whom the district leadership must maintain general good will, anticipating resistances and devising ways to manage conflict, and advocating for and obtaining fiscal, human, and intellectual resources necessary to support the district learning goals.

This process of dealing with both internal and external environments leaves the district leadership needing a way to deal with thinking about the work of combined

external and internal problem solving and networking. Action decisions of district leadership must address both external influences and internal influences. How do districts go about thinking in these multiple arenas? Is there a way that district leadership can filter their action processes for this connected work?

District case studies serve as examples of the work that has been occurring over the past decade in which districts have been increasingly focused attention on reform. These case studies vary in design, some having external private business partnerships, some having external funding foundations who provide support, and some having no external support mechanisms. Regardless of the existence of external partnerships, district focused reform initiatives have given attention to several common elements of design.

The Philadelphia story highlighted the attempts to decentralize, yet ultimately realized that district controlled messages and expectations were essential. The contradiction here is how to create a top-down and bottom-up system at the same time. Lessons learned from case studies suggest that systemic reform assumes that there are well-aligned standards, curriculum, and accountability. This can be determined from the federal and state requirements. One role of the district is to clearly articulate these requirements and set forth formative assessment mechanisms to verify the achievement of the standards. The schools can set forth site-appropriate approaches to achieving the standards, but the disparate capacity of principals and other school-based or central support staff must be addressed through district developed professional development opportunities.

In addition to curriculum and professional development, the district must play a role in process or operational standards for achieving the learning goals expected.

Although this again seems contradictory to decentralization, the need to provide expert technical assistance to schools must be highlighted. When providing the process standards, the need to provide some latitude for personalizing the process standard to the individual school setting is essential. This latitude to personalize addresses the school-based view that would cause the perception that this is just another form of central office dictating what the school must do.

According to Corcoran and Christman (2002) the Philadelphia case study suggested:

. . . the selling of systemic reform as comprehensive common sense and as a package that ‘all had to be done at once,’ undercut the possibility for the input and accommodations necessary for building alliances for reform. The ‘all at once’ approach discouraged critical questions, reflection, and revision - all necessary for organizational learning. (p. 37)

Post-No Child Left Behind Actions

Given the key elements identified from case study research before *NCLB*, what do we know about the needs of district leaders who are engaged in the process of school and district improvement after the enactment of *NCLB*? What can be learned from the case studies reviewed in terms of being effective in a higher stakes environment created by *NCLB*? Must the district response to reform needs in this new, highly-charged environment be different than that which occurred pre-*NCLB*?

Analysis of the current *NCLB* environment suggests that certain elements of performance are important to improved student learning. Several of these essential elements, as reflected in the requirements of *NCLB*, include content and pedagogical knowledge of teachers, provision for high quality professional development, and curriculum match and alignment with national content standards. Other elements deemed

important are best practice instruction aligned with content standards, student and school discipline and positive climate, and student achievement at or above proficiency.

Given these important elements of *NCLB*, what are some of the challenges that are required by *NCLB* that were not addressed in prior case studies? How will districts go beyond strategies and actions identified pre-*NCLB* to address the additional demands of the higher stakes context? What is the status of the implementation of *NCLB* at this time?

The Center for Education Policy conducted a study of the implementation of *NCLB* – Year Two of the *NCLB* Act, completed in January 2004. The report summarized the study of district implementation of the *NCLB* Act. The Center completed brief case studies of 40 school districts across the country to examine the progress being made with *NCLB*. In addition, the study implemented a survey of 400 randomly selected school districts in order to draw some conclusions about how the implementation of *NCLB* is proceeding.

The results of the case studies and surveys indicate that as districts receive increasing notification that more schools are not meeting the AYP requirement, they are more intentionally implementing strategies to address school improvement. This leads to an increased need for districts to learn more about the processes they follow in designing district reform initiatives. CPE (2004) reported on the top 14 strategies that received district allocations for improving identified schools in 2002-2003:

Table 2.3 Improvement Strategies Receiving District Allocations 2002-2003

<u>Improvement Strategy</u>	<u>Districts Prioritizing Strategy (%)</u>
Improving school planning process	53
Increased use of student performance data	86
Increased and improved professional development	56
Matching curriculum and instruction with standards	76
Implementing a school reform model	29
Extended learning time	40
Increased choice options for parents	9
Using research to inform decisions	63
Restructuring the school day for more core content time	26
Hiring additional teachers to reduce class size	23
Using specialists to deliver appropriate assistance to students	38
Increasing district monitoring and oversight	26
Analyzing and revising school budget resources for improvement	22

From From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 2 of the No Child Left Behind Act (2004)

Table 2.3 shows that districts utilized funding for a variety of strategies to improve schools within their system. As with the pre-*NCLB* case studies we see an emphasis on professional development. Professional development would be the method inherent in the improvement of school planning, the increased use of school data for decision-making, the increased match between the standards-based curriculum and the classroom instruction, the use of a school reform model, and using research to inform decisions.

The prior need to address increased job-embedded professional development for teachers is reinforced from the results of the CPE study (2004).

More extensive case study research of districts engaged in *NCLB* related reform initiatives is needed. The details of how individual schools make sense of the strategies and actions of the districts remain unclear. Only through research that takes an extensive look at the quantitative and qualitative evidence of school district reform efforts can a more clear understanding of the reform approaches and strategies be gathered. Thus, the reviewer is left with the questions raised earlier about the lessons learned pre-*NCLB* with regard to the role of the district in school improvement, district leadership roles and actions, and their applicability to the post-*NCLB* period of district leadership. Robust descriptions of the processes district leadership engage in when determining system needs, determining implementation strategies, and justifying actions taken that are important to understanding the role districts play.

Common Theory of Change

Across all case studies reviewed evidence of a common theory of change emerged. This common theory of change revolved around the notion of capacity building through professional development. Anthony Alvarado, in New York Community District #2, David Hornbeck, in Philadelphia, and Bersin and Alvarado, in San Diego and the LFA case studies, all emphasized that improving student learning was highly dependent on changing teacher practice in the classroom. The changes desired in all of these districts were based on the theory that professionally developing leadership and instructional staff presented the most promising strategy for coherent, sustained school improvement. In San Diego, Bersin and Alvarado implemented strategies that improved

teacher knowledge and classroom practice by professionalizing teaching. The strategies implemented focused on professional development for teachers through collaboration, reflection with peers, establishing teacher networks, and on-site coaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2003).

In Kent County, Maryland, Superintendent Costello created a system of professional development that was responsive to needs revealed through data. This design reflected a model of professional inquiry on the part of both teachers and formalized leaders (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Togneri and Anderson reported that Kent County, Minneapolis, and other districts in the total Learning First Alliance set of case studies not reported within the scope of this proposal, adopted new approaches to professional development that involved a coherent and district organized and directed set of instructional improvement strategies. The emphasis here was the focus on district control over professional development content and schedules. This central control was also seen in San Diego under the leadership of Bersin and Alvarado. Use of the structure of small learning communities was noted in Philadelphia (Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Foley, 2001), San Diego (Darling-Hammond, 2002), Kent County, and Minneapolis (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). The common elements tying all of these case study districts together included, but were not limited to, central district control of a well-defined and structured program of professional development, attention to this capacity building as a central component of change for improvement, and small and professional learning communities as a structure of organization to intensify positive learning relationships for teachers and students.

Given that small or professional learning communities are well documented in the literature as promising structures for increased teacher learning and improvements to

classroom practice pre-*NCLB* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Hall & Hord, 1997; Hord, 1997; Hord, 2000; Morrissey, 2000) suggests that this approach to the professional development of teachers is a promising format. Based on a theory of change that suggests that teachers who collaborate within collegial networks have a strong likelihood of improving classroom practice, a review of the literature on this structure is warranted.

Professional Learning Communities

A review of the literature on professional learning communities (PLCs) revealed that in 1992 Victoria Boyd identified seventeen indicators that were highly indicative of a context in which change was likely to be initiated and sustained (Boyd, 1992). The original indicators identified by Boyd were later clustered into four functional groupings (Boyd & Hord, 1994 as cited in Hall & Hord, 2001) as “reducing isolation; increasing staff capacity; providing a caring, productive environment; and promoting increased quality” (p. 192).

The seventeen original indicators identified by Boyd were arrayed under the four clusters referenced above. The first cluster, reducing isolation, related to schedules, school structures, policies and practices that relate to communication and collaboration, and the sense of collegial relationships within the faculty. The second cluster, increasing staff capacity, pertained to policies related to teacher autonomy, policies of staff development and decision-making, and availability of resources. The third cluster developed by Boyd and Hord, providing a caring productive environment, focused on positive teacher and community attitudes, caring relationships, heightened motivation, and networks of partnerships working on improved achievement. The fourth and final cluster, promoting increased quality, related to continuous inquiry and improvement and

a widely held common vision and purpose. In schools that were studied by Hord and others at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) (Hord, 1997; Hord, 2000; Morrissey, 2000) the strong presence of Boyd's indicators were found in those schools that were successful in the improvement of student achievement.

Hord (1997) studied Boyd's indicators and the clusters developed from these indicators (Boyd & Hord, 1994) and identified five dimensions of PLCs. These five dimensions were highly focused on factors in the teachers' workplace and were reflective of teachers who felt supported in their ongoing learning and improvements in classroom practice (Hall & Hord, 2001). They found that:

Such support was manifested as teachers worked together, sharing their craft and wisdom, learning from each other, and collaborating on problems and issues of concern to them. This support increased teacher efficacy, which meant that they gave more attention to students' needs and adopted new classroom behaviors more readily. (p. 197)

The increasing emphasis on attending to the influence of workplace conditions and workplace culture on teachers' practice, and consequently on student outcomes, was evident in the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Hall & Hord, 2001; Hord, 2000; Morrissey, 2000). Hord and others have developed defined descriptors of five dimensions that characterize workplace environments, conditions, and cultures that promote and support teacher work in the context of a PLC. These dimensions are believed to contribute to sustaining reform efforts within schools and districts. Hall and Hord (2001) believed that there is a need for extensive research that would lead to a better understanding of the contributions and impact of PLCs on reform efforts. They asked, "as an organizational arrangement in schools, does the PLC provide the most desirable context for the efficient, high-quality implementation of change?" (p. 203).

Dimensions of PLCs

Based on studies of individual schools that successfully improved student achievement, Hord (1994, 1997, 2000, and 2001) and the SEDL group (Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Morrissey, 2000) developed five dimensions of a model of professional learning communities. As case studies were conducted on individual schools, Hord (2000) found that there exist “significant foundational factors – the presence of which contributed to PLC success, and the absence of which often presaged difficulty or failure in PLC implementation” (p. 3). These foundational factors included “trust is everything,” teachers’ voice being heard, staff and schools that were student-centered, and the existence of open discussions of the impact of add-on programs (p. 7).

The term professional learning community describes a school that operates in a way that engages the entire group of professionals in coming together for learning within a supportive, self-created community. In these settings the participants, comprised of teachers and administrators, come together to interact, test their ideas, challenge their inferences and interpretations, and process new information with each other (Morrissey, 2000).

When new ideas are processed in interaction with others, multiple sources of knowledge and expertise expand and test the new concepts as part of the learning experience. The professional learning community provides a setting that is richer and more stimulating. (p. 3)

Hord (1997) stated that there was no universal definition of PLCs. After considerable research on this structure, Hord concluded that professional learning communities were schools in which the staff operated along the five dimensions she associated with PLCs. The operation of these schools could vary along a continuum of these five dimensions. The five dimensions were defined by Hord (1997) as shared values and vision, collective

learning and application, supportive and shared leadership, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice.

Shared Values and Vision – Dimension One

A fundamental characteristic of a PLC is its strong and unwavering focus on student learning. Hord defined a shared vision as a strong mental image of what is important to the individuals and the organization (Hall & Hord, 2001; Hord, 1997; Hord, 2004). The shared values and vision guide staff and leadership decisions about teaching and learning, and support norms and behaviors in the school and district community. The values and vision are embedded in the daily actions of teachers and administrators. Although staff members are encouraged to get involved in defining and sustaining the vision, they hold themselves responsible for making all decisions on the basis of the vision and values. School or district leadership is responsible to repeatedly communicate and sustain the vision throughout the organization. In an organization that functions as a PLC, the common good is, as stated by Hord (2004), “on a par with personal ambition” (p. 9).

Collective Learning and Application – Dimension Two

PLCs engage school staffs in processes that collectively seek new knowledge and processes. Problems are addressed through the collegial relationships and investigations that promote new knowledge and learning that can be applied to the day-to-day issues of student learning in the classroom (Morrissey, 2000). Schools that operate with this form of PLCs go far beyond issues of schedule, discipline, and fund raising to address the issues at the core of their mission – student learning. “Such collaborative work is grounded in *reflective dialogue or inquiry*, where staff conduct conversations about

students and teaching and learning, identifying related issues and problems” (Hord, 2004, p. 9). The inquiries inherent in this culture allow teachers and administrators to apply new information to problem solving and therefore work to provide new conditions for addressing the needs of students. In these environments educators apply the most effective pedagogy to the instruction of their students and take responsibility for the learning of each and every student (Morrissey, 2000).

Supportive and Shared Leadership – Dimension Three

Hord (2004) found it ironic that transforming a school into PLCs required that the administrative leadership work to transform all staff into a learning community by nurturing the staff’s development into the concept of a community. The transformation of a school into a PLC requires that the traditional view of the principal be set aside in favor of more distributed leadership and joint learning with the staff and administration equally engaged. Within a school PLC, it is important that all staff work and grow together to achieve jointly defined learning goals for staff and students. “Administrators, along with teachers, must be learners: questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions for school improvement and increased student achievement” (Hord, 2004, p. 8). Hord believed that school faculties can get a great deal accomplished if shared leadership is nurtured. People in positions other than formally recognized leadership must be encouraged to provide leadership and direction in addressing the needs of students and staff.

Although many superintendents in the case studies reviewed initially held tight reins on decision-making, there was progressive evidence that more distributed leadership occurred. In San Diego, Bresin and Alvarado learned that changes in high schools would only begin if the high school teachers met as separate PLCs. This was not

part of the original design defined by district leadership. Progress did not occur until the district leadership became more flexible in responding to the views of high school teachers. In Kent County, Maryland, Costella acknowledged that as time went on more collaboration occurred in defining staff development topics and schedules. In fact, increased numbers of professional development days were allotted to school-based decisions and planning. In Minneapolis the initial antagonism between the new superintendent and a high school principal caused resentment and resistance to district strategies for improvement. Following a period of adjustment, both the superintendent and the high school principal found that collaboration on district policies, processes, and procedures resulted in more positive attitudes toward change (Applebaum, 2002).

Supportive Conditions – Dimension Four

Morrissey (2000) wrote, “creating supportive structures, including a collaborative environment, has been described as the ‘single most important factor’ for successful school improvement and ‘the first order of business’ for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their school” (p. 8). Hord (1997) identified two kinds of supportive structures within a school that operates as a PLC: 1) structural conditions; and 2) relationships. Examples of elements that fall under the component of structural conditions include use of time, communication procedures, size of the school, proximity of teachers to each other, teaching roles that are interdependent, teacher empowerment, and professional development processes.

Aspects of supportive conditions that are relevant to relationships are meant to capitalize on the human capacities of the individuals within the organization. Examples of elements that fall under the component of relationships include positive educator attitudes, shared vision and sense of purpose, willingness to accept feedback, strong

cognitive skills, norms of continuous inquiry and improvement, respect, trust, and positive, caring relationships (Morrissey, 2000).

“Supportive conditions determine *when, where, and how* the staff regularly come together to do the learning, decision-making, problem solving, and creative work that characterize a professional learning community” (Hord, 2004, p. 10). Principals can provide aspects of both structural and relationship elements of PLCs. The functioning of the PLCs within the organization will be further enhanced if various district and community groups are supportive of the PLC structure as well. The elements under this dimension seem most clearly related to many of the indicators identified by Boyd (1992).

Shared Personal Practice – Dimension Five

Elmore (2000) stated, “Schools and school systems that are improving directly and explicitly confront the issue of isolation” (p. 17). In the schools studied by Hord (1997, 2000) and Morrissey (2000), teachers having time to share their views and knowledge about professional aspects of teaching was critical. His conclusion that “creating multiple avenues of interaction among educators and promoting inquiry-oriented practices while working toward high standards of student performance” (Elmore, 2000, p. 2), best describes the focus of Dimension Five of Hord’s concept of PLCs. Morrissey (2000) reported that although shared personal practice is a critical aspect of PLCs it is often the last dimension to be developed. Darling-Hammond (1998) reported that teachers who spend time sharing their expertise are more effective in developing higher-order thinking skills in their students and are more effective in meeting the diverse learning needs of today’s students. This suggests that meeting AYP is more likely in teaching and learning environments that promote the development of this dimension of PLCs. Morrissey (2000) stated, “one factor organizes all contexts within a professional

learning community, and that is the shared purpose of improving student learning outcomes” (p. 9).

Designing District Reform

Elmore (2002) argued that schools and school systems that provided systemic district leadership were rare. He maintained that schools and school districts were not designed to respond to the pressures that performance accountability and testing programs bring. As a result, with the enactment of H.R. 1, *NCLB*, the nation’s schools “aren’t designed as places where people are expected to engage in sustained improvement of their practice, where they are supported in this improvement, or where they are expected to subject their practice to the scrutiny of peers or the discipline of evaluations based on student achievement” (p. 4). He further stated:

It would be difficult to invent a more dysfunctional organization for a performance-based accountability system. In fact, the existing structure and culture of schools seems better designed to resist learning and improvement than to enable it. (p. 4)

Elmore (2002) argued that schools and school systems would only be able to respond to the external pressure for accountability if they learned to do their work differently and if they rebuilt the organization of schools and districts around a different way of doing the work.

The most consistent elements of the case studies suggest the key components of a conceptual map that could serve to guide the challenging work of school and district reform in the era of AYP. The anchor concepts within the map are to improve student achievement as defined and measured by AYP by building the capacity of teachers. This capacity is most effectively developed through high quality professional development as required in *NCLB*. The context most evident in the case studies is that of professional

learning communities, where distributed leadership is considered a key element. The supportive ability of the district leadership to focus the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders is guided by the shared vision and beliefs built by the district leadership.

As the critical elements of district level reform phenomenon are traced, it appears that Knapp et al. (2003b), Massell (2000), and others highlight the elements that emphasize collaborative learning within learning communities of staff. These staff learning communities are dependent on supportive district leadership that share defined vision and beliefs. This description aligns with the work done by Boyd and Hord (1994) as they identified key factors operating in schools that were successful in creating and sustaining change and improved student achievement (Hord & Hall, 2001). These schools were characterized as schools in which professional learning communities exist with staff who meet regularly to reflect on classroom practice and inquire into ways to improve that classroom practice in order to improve student achievement. The work of Hipp and Huffman (2003) highlighted the promise that the development of PLCs has for meeting the needs of diverse student groups:

This research speaks to the heart of educational reform in the 21st century, and reveals findings for a new approach for school improvement that involves the entire professional staff in continuous learning and collaboration. Our work provides detailed information about the professional learning community dimensions and how school staffs operate as PLCs. Schools involved in sincere efforts to broaden the base of leadership to include teachers and administrators, to define shared vision based on student learning, and to provide a culture of continual support, will make great strides in becoming learning organizations and addressing critical student needs. (p. 9)

In order to achieve the goal of establishing a PLC culture, the need to retool administrative skill sets is critical. School-based administrators must possess the skills to create the vision of a culture of PLCs and impart in the staff the interest and skills needed to sustain it. School and district administrators face a significant challenge in identifying

schools that truly operate as PLCs. While school staffs often describe themselves as learning communities, they rarely meet the operational definition (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). To assist administrators in their efforts to assess the development and conditions necessary to sustain PLCs in their schools, Hipp and Huffman (2003) and Huffman and Hipp (2003) expanded on the original PLC instrument developed by Hord. The expanded instrument can support district and school-based leadership in determining the extent to which a staff has operationalized the PLC culture. These investigators suggested that such an instrument can provide baseline data, as well as design a developmental continuum through periodic administration. Could the baseline data also be viewed as “readiness data” for beginning the culture change process?

The literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that district leadership actions matter in the change process. Hipp and Huffman (2003) also included the external relationships and support needed from central office in their re-conceptualization of the PLC model developed by Hord. This finding suggests that district efforts to support the establishment, development, and institutionalization of PLCs has promise in assisting schools and districts to meet AYP.

Through the combined review of three distinct bodies of literature - school improvement case studies, the role of districts in school improvement, and professional learning communities – lessons learned show promise for schools and districts as they engage in improvement efforts. Strategies such as those shown in *Figure 2.1* were observed as actions/roles utilized in multiple districts reviewed. Such actions/roles were reported to be key elements of the conceptual framework or theory of change within successful districts. These strategies were referenced and discussed throughout this literature review.

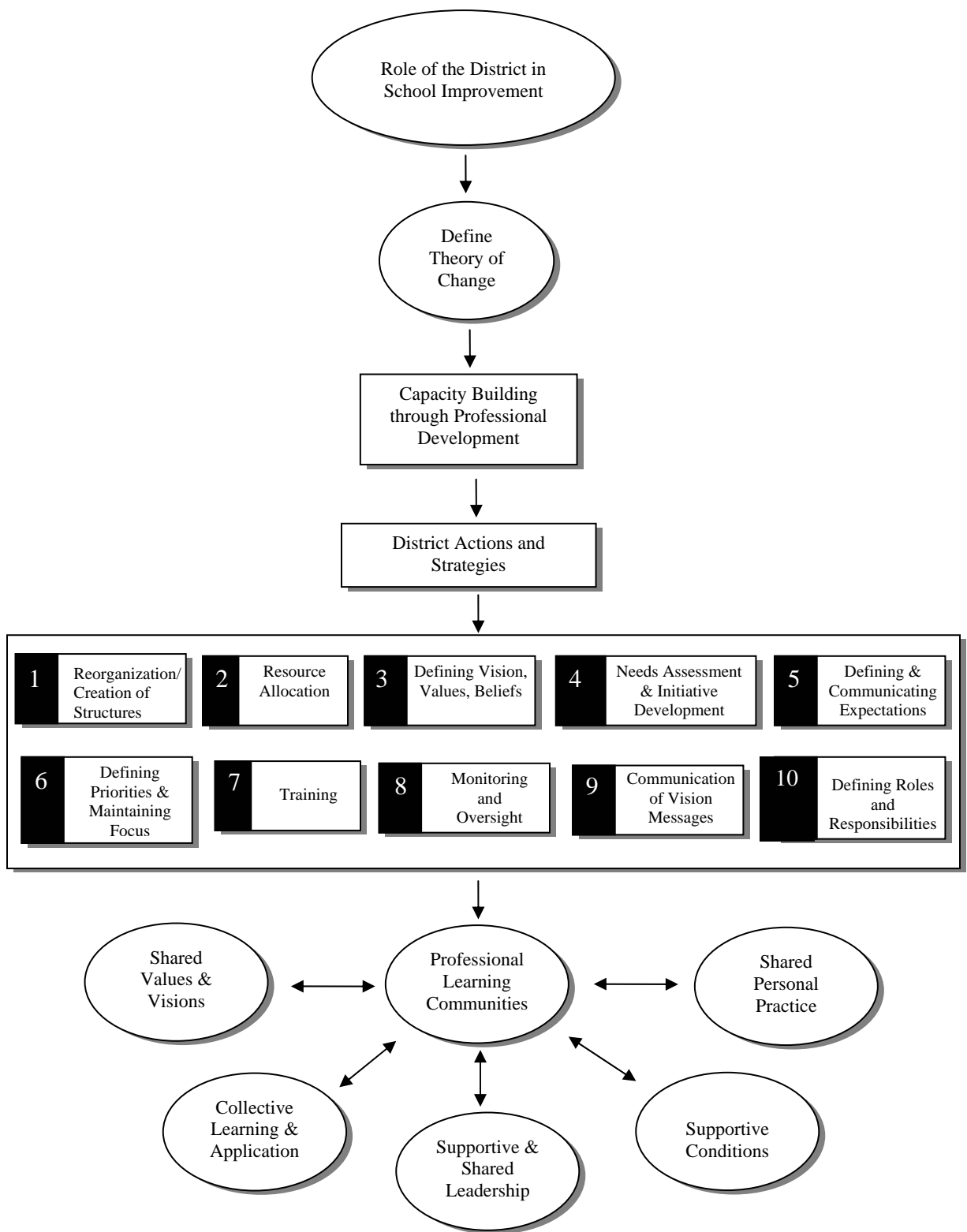


Figure 2.1 Concept Map of District Role in Developing Professional Learning Communities

Elmore (2002), Massell (2000), Togneri and Anderson (2003), and Togneri and Lazarus (2003) stressed that the district has a key leadership role to play in school improvement. The review of the professional learning community literature included in this chapter suggests that PLCs serve as one promising practice for supporting improved teacher capacity. All district case studies built their theory of change on the belief that quality professional development increases teacher knowledge in ways that result in improved classroom practice. These underlying theories are depicted in *Figure 2.1*, which outlines the concept map of the theory of change that most districts followed pre-*NCLB*. This figure summarizes the role of the district as being critical to sustained school improvement. Effective districts define and publicize their theory of change and improvement. *Figure 2.1* declares “capacity building” as the theory of change utilized by effective districts as supported by the literature reviewed herein. Districts then determine their actions and change strategies based on this theory. The actions and strategies employed by the district will influence the change desired. However, the district actions must still address the influences that Knapp, et al. (2003b) discussed. The external environmental context functions as a substantial influence on the desired transformation. As Knapp et al. (2003a) stressed, the district leadership actions have to interface with all aspects of the picture of reform. The theory of action (*Figure 2.1*) that evolved from the review of literature leaves a need for districts to have a model for thinking about the multiple contextual influences that require district action responses. The conceptual framework developed from findings resulting from pre-*NCLB* case studies shows strong linkages with the dimensions of PLCs. The apparent consistencies between these two areas of research suggest that districts that direct their reform efforts and strategies toward these elements and dimensions may increase the likelihood of improving teacher

classroom practice. For district leaders to think effectively and intentionally about their actions an additional model is needed to frame thinking about environmental and contextual demands.

Transformational System

The case studies examined thus far offer many lessons about the distinct actions and strategies utilized by reforming districts to influence change in their individual schools. In the context of *NCLB* and its accountability requirements for AYP districts and schools operate in the context of multiple external environmental influences. These influences have significant impact on the actual reform progress made and must be considered a part of the equation as districts develop their reform initiative.

Senge (1990), speaking on learning within organizations stated, “We learn best from our experience, but we never directly experience the consequences of many of our decisions” (p. 23). This observation addressed more than any attempt to establish a cause and effect relationship in that it also recognized that the multiple environmental and system processes involved in change disrupted that direct learning path. Organizational theorists have different approaches to considering how an organization operates and learns. Senge, for example, found the process of system mapping useful in clarifying how an organizational system worked (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Bolman and Deal shared the views of Oshry (1995) and Senge (1990), who argued that the failure of systems to perceive, read, and understand system dynamics is part of a cycle of blame and self-defense. This cycle is typically reflected in blaming someone else for the failure of the organization to learn and change, thus causing this cycle to continue to repeat itself. This explanation sounds a great deal like the kind of criticism that has been made of public

schools and in particular public school districts in this country. The inability of an institution of public education to improve itself has been at times blamed on the inability of the school districts to be critical players in the process of reform.

With the resurfaced interest and understanding that school districts having a critical role to play in continuous improvement, the understanding of the organizational processes has become more important. As the complex processes of organizational learning are considered, Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest:

Actions are counterproductive because we try to solve problems while avoiding undiscussable issues and tip-toeing around organizational taboos. We ignore important but “sensitive” issues and tell ourselves only a fool would do otherwise. Such strategies often seem to work in the short run but eventually create a double bind: we can’t solve problems without facing issues that we have tried to bury, but that would reveal our cover-up. (p. 30)

The context of this discussion suggests that in most complex organizations there are few clear events that make it easy for the situational actors to agree on exactly what is happening, why it is happening, and what influences are occurring. Most organizations have complex situational factors that make analysis of events simple and linear. In the case of long-term reform initiatives in public education, the stream of complex dilemmas, puzzles, and relationships is ongoing.

Schools, as public institutions, have not reported well to the history of learning of the organization. In many ways schools avoid the view that the creative tensions of growth, learning, and continuous improvement are natural, healthy processes for an organization to experience as it strives to improve its ability to achieve its critical mission. The open acknowledgement of the elements of organizational tensions and systems has not been a component of the planning and reform work of school districts. Thus, in applying the views of Bolman and Deal (2003) to school districts and schools, the work must explore what is really occurring as the reform is planned and implemented.

In their 2002 work on school leadership, Bolman and Deal shared the picture of a Chinese symbol. They suggested that if you do not read Chinese characters you might ignore the image because it makes no sense to you and there is no context, such as a Chinese restaurant menu, that would guide the reading in gaining contextual meaning. The image that they shared in this work is actually two images, one of a woman and one of a child. Without a familiarity and context to interpret the symbols we ignore the information that might be gained in attending to them. This illustration is presented to stress the point that in any situation those involved need sufficient tools and models for understanding what is occurring. This is true in the functioning of school districts and schools. The present era of reform has made these tools and models even more critical. The failure of school district executives and school-based leadership is frequently a function of their inability to examine situations from more than one perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2002). Bolman and Deal stated:

The ability to use multiple frames has three advantages: (1) each can be coherent, focused, and powerful; (2) the collection can be more comprehensive than any single one; and (3) only when you have multiple frames can you *reframe*. Reframing is a conscious effort to size up a situation from multiple perspectives and then find a new way to handle it. In times of crisis and overload, you will inevitably feel confused and overwhelmed if you are stuck with only one option. (p. 3)

The work of these theorists suggests that school districts, like other public organizations, are not closed systems unaffected by external and internal system processes. This is the problem that was described by Knapp, et al. (2003) when they spoke of the need for districts to address the external and internal factors of influence that went beyond issues of classroom practice.

Hoy and Miskel (2005) agree with the perspective that organizational behavior cannot be isolated from external forces. They contend that “competition, resources, and

political pressures from the environment affect the internal workings of the organizations” (p. 18). They suggested that the open systems model of viewing an organization allows leadership to gain the vantage point described as necessary by Bolman and Deal (2002). Hoy and Miskel (2005) described the open systems model as viewing organizations as complex and dynamic. These theorists stated that organizations:

. . . have formal structures to achieve specified goals, but are composed of people who have their own idiosyncratic needs, interests, and beliefs that often conflict with organizational expectations. Thus, organizations have planned and unplanned features, rational and irrational characteristics, and formal and informal structures. In some organizations rational concerns dominate the relationships and natural, social relationships predominate in others. In all organizations, however, both rational and natural elements coexist within a system that is open to its environment. (p. 19)

Hoy and Miskel (2005) furthered argued that natural constraints include environmental forces on the organization change. These environmental systems are both external and internal to the organization. In order to understand the framework within which these theorists view leadership in public education, it is important to understand the formal and informal structures and processes of their social system model. In addition, if public school districts are to design and implement systemic reform initiatives, it is imperative that they understand the dynamics of change anticipated in models such as the model described by Hoy and Miskel.

Key Elements of Open Systems

Hoy and Miskel (2005) reported that there is general agreement about the elements and properties of open social systems such as schools and school districts. These elements create both structure and process of the open organizational system, which is dynamic in nature and built upon roles and relationships that can be ever

changing. The interdependent nature of the organization and its external environment is critical to understanding the ability of the organization to conduct and perform its critical or core mission. Thus, Hoy and Miskel emphasized that the open-systems model stresses the reciprocal ties that exist and bind the organization with those elements that surround it. The school and the school district are “characterized by an interdependence of parts, a clearly defined population, differentiation from its environment, a complex network of social relationships, and its own unique culture” (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, p. 22). In order to understand the application of this open-systems model to school districts and schools, an examination of several of the key elements is needed.

Underlying Assumptions - the Open-Systems View

Based on their extensive review of the literature, Hoy and Miskel (2005) argued that there are several underlying assumptions that frame views of school organizations as open social-systems. Schools and districts are influenced by the values, resources, and politics of the community in which they reside. These values, resources, and politics can be both external factors surrounding the organization and internal factors. Similarly, the people in schools and districts behave in ways that are affected by their individual needs and roles within the organization. As social systems, schools and districts are composed of interdependent parts and characteristics that influence and contribute to the whole organization. Social systems have core missions and goals. Schools and districts have clear teaching and learning missions. There may also be time-ordered goals and operational objectives that function as subgroups of the overall organization. Different structures are embedded in the overall organization to support the functions and goals of the subgroups. To perform the functions as formal or informal organizational groups, norms of behavior exist and are either rewarded or sanctioned.

Behavioral norms and other operational processes are influenced by the political and power relations within an organization's social systems. These social systems in the organizations of schools are both formal and informal. Districts, schools, and classrooms are recognized as formal structures within the organizational entity of public education. Informal administrative, teacher, parental, and community relationships also exist that affect the operational and behavioral norms of the organization. The assumptions cited by Hoy and Miskel (2005) support their view that there are generally accepted systems within the open systems model. A description of the systems within the social system model will follow.

Structural System

School districts and schools are established as formal organizations or sub-organizations within public education. They are identified organizational entities that have defined purposes and goals. Hoy and Miskel (2005) presented a social system model of schools and districts that integrated internal and external elements of the system. One of the internal systems of the organizational model is described as a "structural system," which addresses the bureaucratic expectations and demands of the organization. The structural system of the organization sets forth some common understandings of the roles, functions, and responsibilities of various positions and offices within the organization. These defined roles and responsibilities translate into the types of behaviors and actions that are expected of those in various positions within the organization. The performance of the individuals is either rewarded or sanctioned based on its alignment with the bureaucratic definitions and expectations. The role of the superintendent of a district is in part defined by law, while other components are defined by the expectations of the board of education to which the superintendent reports. The

alignment of the behaviors and actions of the superintendent with law and with the expectations of the board, while dynamic in nature, will influence the success or failure of the superintendent. Similarly, schools as organizations have generally defined job descriptions, procedures, and policies about the expectations for principals and teachers.

Many of the expectations of the bureaucratic side of the organization are less formalized and are vague and unclear. The dynamic nature of organizations almost requires that there be flexibility about the way the systems and individuals within the organization operate. Hoy and Miskel (2005) remind us that the structural systems of the organization can be either helpful to its operations or not, because they hinder the accomplishment of the core mission of the district. Like all of the case studies reviewed in this document, the core of the social system model for schools is teaching and learning.

While many of the existing bureaucratic organizational expectations and functions are based on a theory of division of labor and hierarchy of authority, they ignore the very lively and active informal organization. It is the informal structural systems that evolve into the cliques, networks, and powerful informal personal relations that alter the bureaucratic expectations as they play out in districts and schools.

Schools as bureaucratic organizations are also based on the premise that those in authority possess greater technical knowledge than those viewed as subordinates. This assumption about technical competence is not true in schools or many other organizations. Within the open social systems model it is, perhaps, more appropriate to move from considering districts and schools as bureaucratic or non-bureaucratic to examining them based on their degree of bureaucratization (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). This approach suggests that an organization be examined for the degree of rules and procedural specifications or the degree of authoritarian structure verses a professional

structure in which substantial decision- making is delegated to the professional staff. The members of the professional staff are then viewed as having possession of substantial technical knowledge and expertise for making valid organizational decisions.

Operating in the right balance of degrees of structural elements is somewhat aligned with the debate about centralized decision-making verses decentralized decision-making. As evidenced in the case studies in this chapter, the appropriate balance of district and school contributions is needed to sustain reform. In addition, within the context of the school, the leadership of the administrative team balanced with the decision-making of the professional learning communities becomes a critical element to the functioning interdependence of the organizational systems. How will a district define these role expectations? Will the district need to consider this and other elements of the structural system of their organization as the district determines appropriate actions in their leadership role?

Individual System

Despite the bureaucratically defined roles and expectations of the organization, these formal or informal elements are not always in evidence in districts and schools. Regardless of formally recognized positions, individual needs, concerns, beliefs, and priorities will affect the way the systems interact as they engage in transformational processes. Hoy and Miskel (2005) cited a series of theorists (Herzberg et al., 1959, Locke & Latham, 1984, 1990; Maslow, (1970) who discuss the historical research on the individual motivational and cognitive aspects of the workplace. While it is not the intent to review this expansive body of knowledge within the confines of this chapter, Hoy and Miskel have integrated many of the research findings about adult needs, motivational theory, fairness practices, self and collective efficacy and goal setting into the model of

an social systems model for schools and districts they have developed. They view the “individual system” as a key element of the social system model based on the individual needs, goals, and beliefs that all staff members bring with them to the school and district organization.

The formal and informal interplay between the structures of the bureaucratic organization and the individual systems of the organization strongly influence the nature of how behaviors are acted out in the completion of the core mission of the district. One example of this interplay is described by Hoy and Miskel, while citing the work of Greenberg (1997) on inequity theory. This theory argues that students, teachers, and administrators are concerned about aspects of how the organization operates with regard to the effort required of them as they do their work. The fairness aspect relates to the amount of effort different teachers invest in their work with students, the number and difficulty of the classes assigned to teachers, the challenge level of the school where an administrator is assigned, or the manner and amount of the compensation paid for different positions within the defined structural system. These issues of effort and fairness combine with the employees’ view of their efforts and develop into a sense of self or collective efficacy about their work. Individual or collective efficacy defines the perception that employees have of their potential ability to influence the decisions made in the school or district organization and in their perceptions of their ability to influence the achievement of the students.

Bolman and Deal (2003) argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between the needs of the organization and the needs of the individual. This relationship acknowledges that people and the organization need each other. The relationship must have a good fit between the needs of both the individual and the organization, and when

there is a good balance, both benefit. Bolman and Deal state that people want to know, “How well will this place fulfill my needs?” Organizations universally ask, “How do we find and retain people with the skills and attitudes needed to do the work?” (p. 129).

In the current era of *NCLB* the requirement for “highly qualified teachers” redefines some aspects of what the educational organizations must look for in teacher candidates. In asking how well the organization meets the needs of teachers and administrators, the areas of esteem and self-actualization rise to the top. Employees want to know that they are valued and perceived as competent, and that they are able to view themselves as contributing positively to the achievement of the critical mission of the organization. This is frequently referred to as efficacy. Employees want the organization to view them from the perspective that Bolman and Deal described as “a good investment” (p.129).

During times of change employees tend to feel less secure about their skills and attitudes in the workplace. The personal worries of individual employees during times of change were described by Hall and Hord (2001) in their work on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM). This model argues that during times of change, the people involved respond with different concerns based in part on the level of their knowledge and skills. The concerns that exist for any of the individual actors involved in the change manifest themselves in ways that can interfere with the progress of the district reform initiative, and therefore must be managed and addressed as the initiative is planned and implemented. In most change initiatives the actors involved are all at different levels of knowledge and concern, thus causing the leadership of the reform initiative to need to respond to people differently.

Hoy and Miskel's "individual system" considered the knowledge, cognitive basis, and motivations that lead teachers to feel as though they can perform well in the classroom. In this era of accountability, teachers are experiencing heightened levels of concern about their classroom performance, knowing that there are presently new testing activities that document how their students progress. Both the efficacy issues and the levels of concern that teachers experience affect "how much effort people expend, how long they will persist in the face of difficulties, their resilience in dealing with failures, and the stress they experience in coping with demanding situations" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 153).

Cultural System

A third internal system of the social system model for schools is the "cultural system", which is descriptive of the shared orientations of the workgroup. Other terms used within the research in this area are climate, milieu, ideology, or culture (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Much confusion exists around the concept of the cultural system. Hoy and Miskel provided a general definition of organizational culture as "a system of shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinctive identity" (p. 165). When discussing organizational culture these theorists highlight that the disagreement about the issue of culture becomes more evident when one considers which norms, values, beliefs, or attitudes are shared by the employees. To what extent are they shared or with what intensity? Are there aspects of overt and covert culture and of conscious and subconscious culture?

Although these are difficult questions to answer, they can be viewed from the perspective of degree. Culture can also be viewed from the perspective of the function that it serves in the organization. Hoy and Miskel cited Robbins' work (1998) that

summarized a number of purposes or functions of culture in organizations. Culture has a boundary setting function in that it creates distinction between and among organizations and types of organizations. This aspect of culture provides some degree of the definition of the organization. Culture binds the systems of the organization together and contributes to a standard of behavior expected within the organization.

Hoy and Miskel (2005) suggested that the culture of an organization can be mapped by using such elements as innovation, outcome orientation, people orientation, team orientation, or aggressiveness. This process would guide the understanding of district leadership in action decisions and their purpose. While the cultural map would be created by considering the values of the organization as evidenced by such indicators as those just cited, they provide three cautions about working with culture:

First, cultures are deep, not superficial; thus if you assume that you can manipulate it, you are likely to fail. Second, culture is broad because it is formed by beliefs and assumptions about daily life in organizations; hence, deciphering culture is a major challenge that should be focused if it is to be successful. Third, culture is stable because it provides meaning and makes life predictable; consequently, changing it is difficult at best. (p.171)

Based on this advice, districts and schools must cautiously consider the work they will do with organizational cultures. The mapping of organizational culture that is done to better understand the cultural system of the organization and its influence and interaction with the other systems are key to developing reform initiatives that improve the achievement of the core mission of the organization – teaching and learning.

An aspect of the cultural system of an organization that Bolman and Deal (2003) believed could be used as a tool for change is the symbolic elements of the organization. These theorists describe a retooling effort on the part of Volvo's European sales groups. In this example the authors describe how pictures, documents, and object symbols can send clear messages about the direction that the organization is moving. Bolman and

Deal suggested that leadership personnel not ignore the potential of this aspect of leading change or reform efforts. This concept can be combined with knowledge about the process of change, beginning with the process of mapping the “way things are around here.” The key norms of an organization typically relate to control, support, innovation, social relations, rewards, and standards of excellence (Bolman & Deal, 2005). It is essential to understand that cultures can be positive or negative in their ability to promote or impede improvement. As aspects of culture are addressed, elements of trust will emerge if the organization is open, positive, and committed to the teachers.

Political System

The original hierarchical structure of organizations was intended to allow leadership to control the workforce. Hoy and Miskel (2005) stated, “the classic definition of power is the ability to get others to do what you want them to do. . .” (p.203). While there are both formal and informal sources of power, “a large portion of any administrator’s time is directed at ‘power-oriented’ behavior – that is ‘behavior directed primarily at developing or using relationships in which other people are to some degree willing to defer to one’s wishes” (p.210). This statement implies that administrators or leaders either engage in exhibiting these power behaviors or are engaged in responding to them as they are exhibited by others in the district or school environment. The current initiative of empowering teachers by sharing power and decision-making with them recognizes that viewing power as only the domain of administrators will hamper the progress and shared commitment that is needed in our districts and schools today. The work of Hord (1997, 2002), Hipp and Huffman (2003) suggested that this empowerment of teachers will positively impact student achievement. Thus, the development of PLCs in schools provides the structural system needed to share the power and responsibility in

schools, but would also need the cultural value of sharing decision making. The desired interaction of Hoy and Miskel's systems suggests that sharing power throughout the organization builds efficacy in an organization, including schools.

The power relationships exist both internal and external to the organization. For school systems and schools external power influences come from government, unions, parents, and other organized special interest groups. Certain external influences may dominate power relations or attempt to insert themselves into the position of power in the relationships between members of the organization.

The existence of internal groups of influencers must be considered when planning and implementing initiatives. The interactive nature of external and internal power groups affects how the leadership must engage in political actions to assert their own influence in moving the desired change forward. The actions of the district intended to support schools in the development of PLCs should consider the various power relationships that exist in and around the organization as the change innovation is implemented. Bolman and Deal (2003) observed:

The political frame does not blame politics on such individual characteristics as selfishness, myopia, or incompetence. Instead, it asserts that interdependence, divergent interests, scarcity, and power relations inevitably spawn political activity. It matters not who the individual players are. It is naïve and romantic to hope organizational politics can ever be eliminated in organizations. (p. 186)

The coalitions that exist within organizations have different perspectives and priorities.

Some of the decisions that need to be made in school districts and schools relate to the allocation of resources, which are typically viewed as insufficient in public education.

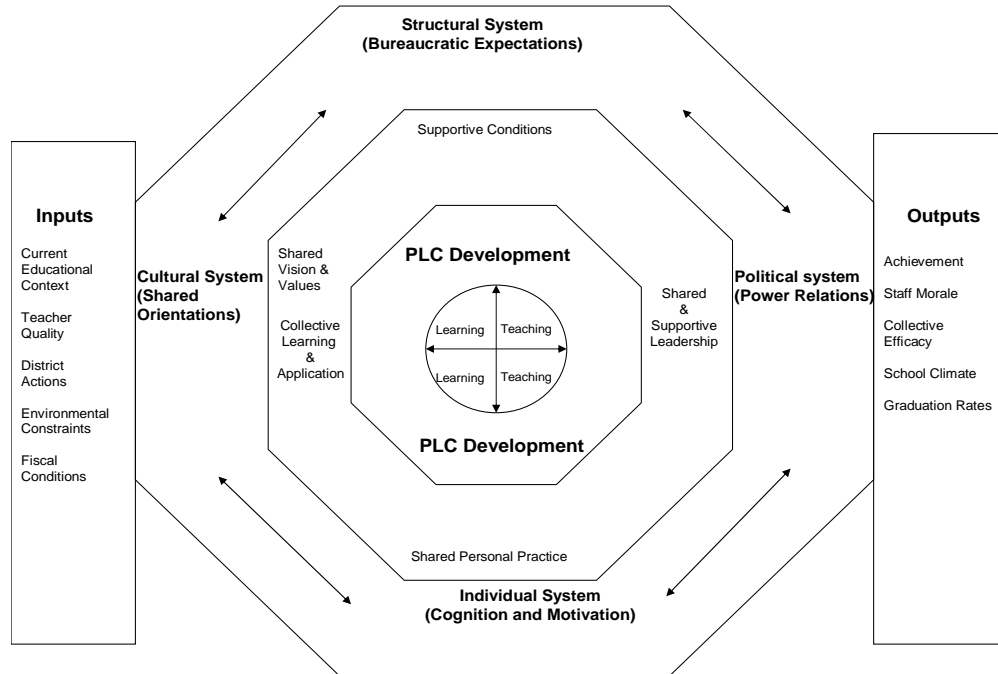
Hoy and Miskel (2005) suggested that the differences in the philosophies and priorities that various coalitions have about allocating resources produce conflict. Hoy and Miskel further argued that this conflict is neither "bad nor destructive. Conflict can be the source

of positive change” (p.231). Additionally, they argued that conflict can be used to improve the communication and provide some balance to the power. District and school leadership should acquire different conflict management styles in order to be able to balance the individual needs with the organizational needs. If the balance is not well tooled, then the leadership or individual players in and around the organization have choices to stay or leave. At times, Bolman and Deal (2003) suggested that some players will stay, but become passive aggressive in deterring the reform from taking root.

The systems of the social systems model provide district leaders a frame within which to analyze situations and action decisions. A process such as this will need to also include an analysis of both environmental influences and internal influences. *Figure 2.2* represents the model that contains the four systems, the contextual external environment, the input and output, and the invisible transformational process.

Applying the Social System Model to District Action

Figure 2.2 Social Systems Model for Schools and Districts
Adapted from Hoy & Miskel (2005)



The model developed by Hoy and Miskel (2005) was adapted for application to the leadership of a district or school organization. The open-systems model places great emphasis on the interaction of the various internal systems that must be considered as the central leadership makes decisions about the actions inherent in the district leadership role. Bolman and Deal (2003) reported that this model “places great value on optimizing such administrative processes as deciding, communicating, motivating, and leading people” (p. 297). The model was adapted further as the review of literature proceeded.

Figure 2.2 adapted the work of Hoy and Miskel to align with the various dimensions of professional learning communities. These dimensions offer a parallel framework to the internal systems discussed by Hoy and Miskel (2005). This adaptation highlights teaching and learning as the central core of the open system. Surrounding the

critical mission is the continuous learning and professional development structure of professional learning communities (PLCs). The five dimensions of the PLC framework, which were described earlier in this chapter, are arrayed to align with the four systems within the social system model – structural, political, individual, and cultural. This suggests, for example, that if a district leadership action aligned with a structural system issue, then it could be considered for its alignment with the PLC dimension of “supportive conditions.” The intentional level of analytic thinking that might occur with such a model supports a clearer understanding of the dynamics of leadership and leadership actions.

Summary

The research reviewed in Chapter 2 demonstrates that the view of the school as the sole unit of change has been reconsidered and that there is now renewed interest in the role of the district in leading and sustaining school improvement as systemic change. The underlying exploratory hypothesis of the investigations cited in Chapter 2 is the belief that district leaders, through their actions, implemented strategies and policies had some positive impact on the improvement of the effectiveness of schools within their district. The analysis of the work of superintendents such as Alvarado, Hornbeck, Bresin, and others suggests that the decisions and priorities set forth in their districts influenced the subsequent actions of the individual schools and were perceived differently by their schools and school-based leaders and teachers. In addition to the actions of superintendents, actions of other district leadership were shown to influence both the direction taken by the district and the reactions of individual schools. Districts that are now being re-engaged in a redefined role within the process of school improvement, must

also examine the impact of their efforts. The review of relevant literature suggests that there is value in district leadership reflecting on district actions through the lenses of the social-systems model (*Figure 2.2*) and the conceptual framework for district actions (*Figure 2.1*). Districts need to identify exemplars of success and be able to explain their purpose and effectiveness.

The district that was the focus of this study is referred to as the Suburban District in this study report. The study focused on the efforts of the Suburban District to develop professional learning communities (PLCs) system wide. The study focuses on a secondary analysis of the actions the district took in supporting school efforts to develop PLCs. The study sought to determine the utility of using a conceptual map for district actions and a social system model to frame district thinking about the actions used in providing district leadership. The Suburban District leaders focused on the systemic development of PLCs and the systemic cultural change required to becoming an inquiry-based self-study district.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

Case Approach and Context

This case study seeks to answer the question: What are the actions that districts take in supporting the development of professional learning communities (PLCs) in schools? Given the growing body of literature about the promise of (PLC) to improve student achievement (Boyd & Hord, 1994; DuFour & Eaker, 1992, 1998; Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2001; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Hord, 2000, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Morrissey, 2000), the question was important to study because districts need to understand how to play a leadership role in PLC development. The study evolved from inquiries about the approaches that districts were taking to address the achievement and professional development requirements of the *No Child Left Behind* Act. The research question was derived from the need of districts to identify specific approaches and actions that have been implemented in the name of school and district improvement.

The review of recent literature demonstrates that the actions districts take in the performance of their leadership responsibilities matters and does influence the ability of the schools to implement consistent and coherent reform strategies (Applebaum, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, 2003; Elmore, 1993; Knapp et al., 2003a, 2003b; Massell, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The investigation of such real world problems creates opportunities for inquiries of importance (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The opportunity to examine the work conducted in my district over the two-year period preceding this study brought together my personal need to understand the process of

providing district leadership with a need to understand the influence of actions taken by the district.

Given the importance of district leadership in sustained reform, it was important to describe what the district under study did as the leadership role was acted out. A qualitative approach was most effective in identifying what actions the district took when leading schools to develop PLCs. A qualitative approach was also needed to provide a detailed view of the leadership view of district actions (Creswell, 1998).

Guiding Orientations

Two guiding structures were developed to limit the analysis of the data gathered during the study (see *Figures 2.1 and 2.2*). An interactive theoretical approach was adopted, assuming that change and PLCs occur as a result of internal and external factors of the social system model. Using this theoretical model interactions between the District leadership actions and the implementers of the change initiative were explored in the study. The empirical inquiry investigated a contemporary problem of change in education and took a solution approach within a real world context of a school district (Yin, 2003). A case study method was appropriate due to the heavy influence and pertinence of contextual factors in the case (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative approaches to research incorporate investigations of actions that have intentions and consequences, some of which are straightforward and others that must be considered from the perspectives of others (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). The study focused on the actions and decisions taken by the superintendent and central leadership team of a mid-sized suburban district. The actions studied were part of a systemic initiative intended to support the development of PLCs in all schools in the district.

In this study I conducted secondary analysis of the actions of the district over a two-year period. The case study approach is particularly suited to this investigation because the original data were gathered over time in the real district situations and analyzed through secondary processes later. The richness of case study data has the potential to reveal the complexity of the real nested contextual underpinnings of the study. The qualitative approach and data collection revealed the “lived” perspectives and interpretations of the people about their experiences with the events and processes associated with the district actions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10).

Conceptual Framework and Models of Analysis

This study sought to examine the actions of a suburban school district in its efforts to design an approach to respond to the need to improve student achievement. Building on the belief that a more collaborative district and school culture was essential to ultimately improve student achievement, the district sought to establish conditions of PLCs across all schools. The investigation was intended to be exploratory and descriptive in nature. The study explored what the district did to support the development of PLCs in schools and how the district leadership’s actions were perceived by the key leadership of individual schools. In addition, the study examined the relationship between the perceived existence of PLC dimensions by each school staff group at the beginning of the District initiative and the perceived progress over the first year of implementation as assessed by the school leadership.

The districts actions were gathered by review and analysis of archival District documents, data, and records generated by the actual work of the District leadership. A secondary analysis was conducted of all gathered data using two conceptual models, the

guiding conceptual map of district actions leading to PLCs and the social system model for schools and districts. A review of recent literature revealed that districts have engaged in reform efforts that have been studied and reported (Applebaum, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, 2003; Elmore, 1993; Knapp et al., 2003a, 2003b; Massell, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). These case studies have not reached the level of capturing the specific actions of districts over time and the reactions of school leadership. In contrast, this study was designed to capture the actual events and actions of the Suburban District as the leadership of the District went about the task of systemic reform.

Guiding Questions

One design feature of the study was to provide more detailed descriptive information to respond to questions such as: What did the Suburban District do to support the development of PLCs in the schools? How did individual key instructional leaders in schools describe their perspectives of the influence or impact of district actions intended to support the development of PLCs? What did school-based leaders want from district leadership? The methods selected for use in this study supported the description of the phenomenon of district actions to develop school-based PLCs that address these questions.

Personal Experience with Study Topic

My personal administrative experience included five years as an elementary school principal. The educational context at that time was one of emerging state assessment and accountability. The school in which I served as principal was located in the state of Maryland. At that time, all schools were expected to show yearly student performance improvement, eventually obtain a minimum achievement of 70% of the

students reaching the *satisfactory* level. In cases where schools did not achieve yearly improved student performance, as captured by a school performance index, the schools would ultimately be placed on a list of schools needing local or state reconstitution. This designation was actually extremely rare and in fact never occurred in the district in which I worked.

Now, serving as the Superintendent of Schools in the same district, the Suburban District, the sense of urgency to increase student achievement has been intensified based on the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The Suburban District set forth a goal to develop a culture in which teachers engage in constant inquiry that informs their work with students and informs policies and decisions district-wide. If all school-based operations in all schools achieved the level of teacher inquiry and teacher leadership inherent in a culture of PLCs, then student needs would be met more fully, teacher morale would improve, and the interdependent team of administrators and teachers would engage in a model of true distributed leadership.

This chapter presents the rationale for the study, as well as a review of the methodology used. A description of the case study setting is presented. Protocols for data selection, data gathering, and data interpretation will be discussed. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the process of school reform has been constant throughout the history of public education. The past decade has intensified the work of school improvement and shown evidence of shifting the discussion to a bifurcated model of attention to both individual schools and to the leadership role of the district as a guiding entity. By studying the actions of a single organization, the investigator intends to illuminate lessons that can guide the decision-making of other districts that want to bring to the forefront their role in the improvement of schools in their system.

Research Design

Research Tradition

The study utilized a single case study method to investigate the impact of the district superintendent and district leadership team's actions to establish system wide PLCs. This methodology allowed the investigator to provide a detailed description of actions taken by the District in the scope of the reform. The case study tradition of inquiry is "an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). The focus of this case study was the District's role, as studied through district actions, in the development of PLC's across all schools. The single case study involved holistic and embedded opportunities for data collection and analysis, with data analysis of both District and individual school perspectives of members of both District and school leadership teams.

The single district case study method was used because of the desire to respond to the issue raised by Creswell in the following statement, "I am reminded how the study of more than one case dilutes the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the greater the lack of depth in any single case" (p. 63). The intent of this research was to examine the perceived impact of district actions on school development of PLCs as a strategy for school improvement. While it investigated a single district from the holistic perspective, the embedded opportunity to also study schools provided additional perspective on district actions.

The District was engaged in the development as the focus of the school reform approach at the time this study was conceived. Members of the District's Central

Instructional Leadership Team gathered data for their work through multiple sources, such as surveys, focus groups, feedback from professional development participants, and structured interviews with groups. The CILT understood these processes of data collection and analysis in order to revise plans for professional development and to develop work plans for the next school year. The CILT conducted reviews of all data but took in-depth formal analysis of only some of the data that were gathered. Those data analyzed formally by the District were considered components of the archival documents that were the focus of the secondary analysis of this study. Specifically, I completed a secondary analysis of the data that existed from the work of the CILT. The differences in the data analysis conducted by the CILT and the secondary analysis I undertook will be highlighted in my discussion of the approaches I took to data gathering and data analysis information is described later in this chapter.

Instruments Used

Instruments used for the collection of data were selected by the District leadership staff as a component of their normal work. They were not selected for the purposes of this study. First I will describe the instruments selected by the District for their work, followed by a description of the data that were used for secondary analysis. The scope of archival data was too broad to include everything available in the District archival records for secondary analysis purposes. Archival data were selected on the basis of relevance to the study's central questions. In order to establish the trustworthiness I have described the processes used as part of my secondary analysis of existing District data.

School as Learning Organization Instrument

To determine the baseline of teacher perceptions of the District and school readiness for PLCs, the District created a Suburban District survey that combined items from two instruments, the School as Learning Organization (SLO), and the Collective Efficacy Scale (Goddard, 2002). The School as Learning Organization is an instrument developed by Hord (1996) to provide a means of assessing the extent to which current conditions in a school are conducive to the development of the dimensions of learning communities. The instrument consists of 17 descriptors identified as attributes and grouped by the five major dimensions of PLCs.

The attributes include the following: (a) collegial and facilitative participation by a principal who shares leadership, power, and authority by inviting staff to share in decision-making (2 items); (b) shared vision developed from staff commitment to student learning and referenced consistently in the work of the staff (3 items); (c) learning that is done collectively and work that applies the learning to create solutions that address the needs of the student (5 items); (d) visitation and inspection of each teacher's classroom by peers who provide feedback and assistance to support improvement (2 items); and (e) physical conditions and human capacity that support the school (5 items) (Meehan, Orletsky, & Sattes, 1997, p.4).

The response option on each of the 17 items was a five-point scale with different descriptive sentences under the end points and the middle value. The SLO survey was field tested by 690 teachers in 21 schools served by the Appalachia Educational Development Laboratory and in one additional urban school that was known from prior research to be in a continuously improving mode (Meehan, Orletsky, & Sattes, 1997). The latter school served as the *known group* for validity analysis of the scale. Technical

information about the instrument obtained from this study confirms the reliability and validity of the item and dimension scores. Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliabilities for the dimension scores range from 0.83 (Dimension 2) to 0.87 (Dimension 1). The Alpha for the total instrument is 0.94. Correlations between the dimension scores are all positive and significant ($p < .0001$). Meehan, Orletsky and Sattes concluded that the instrument differentiates among schools on the five dimensions and total score and reflects differences in staff *maturity* as a PLC (Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas, 2005). The SLO was administered to all 50 school staffs in August 2004, prior to the opening of the school year. Shortly thereafter each school received the total score and each dimension score for their scores in a brief report (Appendix A & B).

Collective Efficacy Instrument

The Collective Efficacy Scale (CE-Scale) developed by Goddard (2002), and Goddard, Hoy and Woolfolk Hoy (2000) is a 21-item instrument. In the initial development, items were used from the original Gibson and Dembo (1984) teacher efficacy scale to reflect collective efficacy by changing the object of the efficacy items from “I” to “We.” Additional items were written to reflect research and the recommendations of a panel of experts. The items were subjected to both fields and pilot testing. Subsequent testing of criterion validity, predictive validity, and reliability scores were conducted using a sample of 452 teachers in 47 randomly selected elementary schools in a large urban district in the Midwest. The 21 items were submitted to a principal axis factor analysis. All items loaded strongly on a single factor and explained 57.89 % of the item variation. The alpha coefficient of reliability was strong (.96). Criterion-related validity was tested against relationships with personal teacher efficacy, faculty trust in colleagues, and environmental press.

Combined Suburban District Survey Instrument

The survey instrument created by the Suburban District as an initial step in implementing the change to a culture of a learning organization was designed to focus primarily on assessing school maturity as a PLC. As a result, all 17 items of the SLO survey instrument were included in the survey. Of secondary interest to the Suburban District leadership team were considerations of teacher collective efficacy beliefs. As a result, only four items from the CE-Scale were selected for inclusion in the final District survey.

The rationale for the selection of the specific items was based on the theoretical model underpinning the CE-Scale. This model assumes that cognitive processing of information about mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective states occur through analysis of the teaching task and the assessment of teaching competence. Five items from the Collective Efficacy Scale showed during analysis an inter-relationship. Two of these items related to judgment of group competence were selected for addition to the SLO instrument. The other two items added to the SLO instrument were related to group competency and task analysis, as factored by Goddard (2000) and his colleagues.

The central District leadership team administered the Suburban District Survey containing all 17 items of the SLO survey instrument and four items from the Collective Efficacy Scale to all teachers during one pre-school professional development day in August 2003. Principals administering the survey were provided with explanatory information on the instrument and a PowerPoint presentation to introduce their faculties to PLCs and the survey instrument. A total of 2,448 teachers completed at least some

items on the survey. The teacher data from the ten schools (n=404) included in this study were utilized for the secondary analysis conducted in this study.

District's Study of ILT Perceptions in Ten Schools

The Suburban CILT leadership was responsible for most actions taken by the District in the PLC initiative. The Superintendent of Schools, who functions as a member of the CILT, is also the chief investigator of this study. In order to assess the perceptions of school-based Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) about the helpfulness and extensiveness of the District's actions and on their perceptions about the progress that they made during the implementation year developing PLCs in their schools, the CILT identified ten schools where faculty had varied in their perceptions of the conditions of readiness in their schools for PLCs. These schools varied in their demographics. Table 3.2 displays the demographics for the schools that were selected by the CILT.

Table 3.1 Individual Study School Demographics

Unit	Student Enrollment (2003-04)	Special Education (%)	Limited English Proficient (%)	FaRMS-eligible (%)	White (%)	African-American (%)	Other Non-White* (%)
American Middle School	1,299	20.8	0.5	39.2	57.5	34.5	7.8
Leadership High School	1,793	10.2	0.3	3.8	91.0	4.4	4.5
Level Elementary School	384	15.5	0.0	14.7	94.0	2.8	3.1
Military Drive Elementary School**	441	17.6	2.5	54.0	39.6	49.4	10.8
River Walk Middle School	657	16.8	++	36.6	76.8	18.2	4.8
Upper Cross Roads Elementary School	480	21.5	0.0	3.4	97.5	0.6	1.8
Community Elementary School	593	15.3	0.0	19.1	72.5	21.9	5.5
Community High School	1,053	13.7	0.0	20.9	64.2	30.5	5.2
Open Space Elementary School**	589	15.2	++	73.0	32.4	60.9	6.6
Hoyle Middle School	935	18.0	++	37.3	61.3	33.5	5.0

*Includes Native American, Asian, Hispanic students

**School designated to receive Title 1 services

+ Based upon 2003-04 student enrollment, Suburban District Schools ranks 7th in size among 24 Maryland Local School Systems. For the 1999-2000 school year, Suburban District Public Schools ranked 121st among school systems in the United States (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1999-2000).

++N<5 (not reported)

To support data-based planning of the next phases of implementation of the PLC initiative, the CILT designed a perceptual survey with a set of individual survey items.

The survey given, which will be referenced as the ILT Progress Survey (IPS), included

three separate rating tasks, which will now be described. The first IPS item requested that the ILT members rate each of the ten district actions that are the focus of this study (see *Figure 2.1*) as either use a lot, used a little, or not used at all. The next IPS item asked ILT members to rank the ten district actions for their degree of helpfulness in supporting the development of the conditions of PLCs in their school. A ranking of 1 meant that the action was the most helpful and, conversely, a 10 indicated that the action was the least helpful. Respondents were permitted to record “NT” for action(s) that were not taken by the district. The third IPS item presented a Likert-style scale with number ratings from 1 to 5. The ILT members were each asked to indicate the rating for the degree of progress made by their school in establishing the conditions of PLCs. A rating of 1 meant that the school was still at the initiation level, 3 indicated an implementation level of progress, and 5 was labeled as institutionalization. Members of the CILT used District faculty to administer the IPS surveys to each member of ILTs in ten schools.

In order to assess possible differences in their own perceptions on district actions and the perceptions of ILTs, four members of the Central Instructional Leadership Team (CILT) also completed the first two items of the ILT Progress Survey (IPS).

ILT Perceptions from Structured Interviews

To enhance the information the CILT gathered from the ILT members structured interviews were held with the ILT of each school. These team interviews were conducted between June and July, 2004. The interviews were structured in the same manner at each of the schools, with an interview protocol followed for each interview (Appendix D). The interviews at all of the ten schools selected by the CILT were conducted by one of the two facilitators, who were trained by a member of the CILT on the interview protocol. The interviews were conducted with each school ILT separately, with a tape

recording made of the session and later transcribed. Interviews were transcribed by a secretary who did not know the people in the schools. All names were deleted in the transcripts to provide anonymity. Each of the ten school ILT interviews was held at the end of June or the beginning of July 2004, after the close of the school year. ILT members include the principal, assistant principal(s), the instructional facilitator, and the mentor.

During July, the CILT held a two-day retreat to discuss the “patterns” of responses for input to refinements of the 2004-2005 District Work Plan. Given that the ILTs in the ten schools and the CILT members were able to provide substantial enhancement to the understanding of perceptions of District actions, I undertook secondary analysis of all data gathered by the District on these ten schools. My secondary analysis of the interview transcripts began in the autumn of 2004.

Sampling

The selection of the district for study was based on what Maxwell (1996) refers to as purposeful sampling. This district was selected to provide insight and perspective on the actions that districts take in attempting to establish district-wide school-based PLCs. Although the researcher has had the opportunity to speak with other superintendents who are providing professional development on the implementation of PLCs in their districts, none of these superintendents describe an intentional goal of having PLCs become an embedded structure for professional development district-wide for all schools. In addition, the literature does not presently document the action decisions of superintendents and district leadership. The Suburban District selected had a stated goal of district-wide PLCs as a more effective structure for ongoing and continuous improvement with a focus on improving classroom practice. As such it provided a

unique case from which to gain understanding to contribute to further theoretical development of conceptions of professional learning communities (Maxwell, 1996, p. 72).

My personal motivation to explore the actions was to: (a) document and analyze actions taken during the process of district leadership; and (b) begin to become a more inquiry-based district through the study of the leadership processes of the district in which I serve as superintendent. The accomplishment of both of these purposes would influence future actions of the leadership provided in the Suburban District.

The Suburban District encompasses the entire geographic area of Suburban County. The District's school population was increasing by approximately 300-400 students per year during the period of the study. Table 3.2 presents the demographic characteristics of the Suburban District in 2004.

Creswell (1998) discusses various methods for selection of individual cases. While the district case selected for this study represents a unique opportunity to study a district intentionally engaged in an identified innovation, the schools selected were based on different parameters. Creswell also suggested that multiple cases, which the schools can be considered, should represent "maximum variation" (p.120) so as to fully display multiple perspectives about the case under study.

Table 3.2 Suburban County Demographic Profile 2003-2004

Total Budget	\$278,707,743
Per Pupil Expenditure	\$6,972
Enrollment	40,252
Number of Schools	50
Number of Full-Time Equivalent Teachers	2,837
Average Teacher Salary	\$45,926
Teachers with less than ten years experience (%)	53
Teachers with Conditional Certificates (%)	3.5
Classes taught by “Not Highly Qualified” (%)	19.9
Students with disabilities (%)	14.7
Students with Limited English Proficiency (%)	0.7
Free and Reduced Meal Eligibility (%)	17.5
White Student Population (%)	79.2
African-American Student Population (%)	15.5
Other Non-White Student Population (%)	5.3

The schools selected by the District for interviews were selected based on their high or low perceived readiness on the School As a Learning Organization Instrument (Meehan, Orletsky, & Sattes, 1997). The mean total SLO survey score was used to categorize schools according to high or low readiness. Three low readiness schools were included in the study school sample and six high readiness schools were in the sample selected by the District leadership. One school selected by the District for interview was perceived by the staff as having a mid-range readiness. This school was included in the

study schools for all secondary analysis except the comparisons between purely low and high readiness schools. Two high schools, three middle schools, and five elementary schools were selected as the interview schools by the District and thus, the sample schools for this study.

Some individuals in the study sample were identified by role within the CILT at the district level and the ILT at the school level. Therefore, no specific sample selection methodology was needed. CILT members were responsible for most district leadership decisions with respect to the focus of this case study. The Superintendent of Schools, who functions as a member of the CILT, is also the chief investigator of this study. The school-based ILTs include the principal, assistant principal(s), the instructional facilitator, and the mentor. The ILTs provide leadership to the instructional program at the school level and work with the school improvement teams as plans are more clearly defined annually.

Data Collection

The study was bounded by its focus on one single school district over a two-year period of time. The 2002-2003 school year served as a year of planning the District's PLC initiative and the 2003-2004 school year was the first year of implementation of the initiative. All data gathered was confined to this two year planning and implementation period.

The study utilized several types of data: (a) survey data; (b) structured interview data; and (c) archival records and documents. Each data type was examined within the framework of *Figure 2.1*, describing possible district actions, and *Figure 2.2*, the social system model for schools.

Data gathering began by reviewing all archival documents from the two-year period of the study. Archival documents and data files were compiled to provide descriptive information about the actions and events that occurred in the initiative to utilize the innovation of PLCs. These archival documents were gathered from several places, including the Office of Professional Development, the Offices of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Office of the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, the Office of Information and Technology, the Office of Research and Evaluation, and the Office of the Superintendent. The sequence of the review of the data gathered from these offices will now be described.

I first began by gathering District materials from the period of this study on the topic of *change to a learning organization*. These documents were filed or shelved under topics such as *reorganization*, *CILT*, *Annual Leadership Conference*, *Educational Leadership Team Meetings*, or *Professional Learning Communities*. Documents such as agendas, training lesson plans, training materials, and training feedback data were gathered from other offices. All written communication was gathered on topics related to the reform initiative. Once gathered, the archival documents were organized chronologically and a complete list of these documents was developed (see Appendix F). An artifact memo was then written as each document was reviewed and described. Memos were saved as text files for future processing and organized with the artifact documents.

Data Analysis

The value and quality of a case study is dependent on the connections the investigator can make between the data gathered, the questions asked, and the findings

and interpretations made. Yin (2002) described this as developing the “chain of evidence” (p. 105). He stated: “The principle is to allow an external observer – in this situation, the reader of the case study – to follow the derivation of any evidence, ranging from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions” (p. 105). In order to fulfill this quality parameter, the report must cite sufficient references to the database elements. These references must include both the quantitative data references and the quotations that support findings and conclusions. A high quality case study is described by Yin (2002) as citing a “convergence of evidence” from multiple data sources utilized in the case study (p. 100). This convergence can be utilized in the development of the findings of fact in the case. Yin described the ultimate chain of evidence as being able to “move from one part of the case study process to another, with clear cross-referencing to methodological procedures and to the resulting evidence” (p. 105).

A description of the process of data analysis will now be presented. The description will begin with the analytic methods for compiling and narrowing the data from the individual ILT Progress Surveys (ISP) conducted with the members of the ten school-based Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs). Next a description of the process for gathering and narrowing the data from the structured interviews will be shared.

Analysis of ILT Progress Surveys

Individual ISPs were given to each member of the school ILTs prior to the structured interviews. The first ISP item was rating their school on its progress in establishing the culture of PLCs in that school. The second ISP item was to review a list of ten district actions or strategies and rate each on the level or extensiveness of use by district leadership. On the third individual ISP item each ILT team member was asked to

take the list of ten district actions or strategies and rank them according to their level of helpfulness in establishing the desired PLC culture in their school.

Analysis of School Progress in Developing PLC Culture

On the first task, the rating of the school progress in establishing a culture of PLCs in their school, each member of the ILT was asked to rate the progress or status of establishing the culture of PLCs in their school on a Likert Scale format, indicating the numbers 1 through 5, with 1 showing the descriptor of *initiation*, 3 showing the descriptor *implementation*, and 5 showing the descriptor *institutionalization*. Because it was possible that each of the ILT Team members might view the status differently, decision rules were developed to support the compilation of their ratings. Team ratings that were all 1 or 2 were determined to indicate that the school was in the initiation stage of establishing a PLC culture. In this case the school could be described as beginning to share the language of PLCs and not yet understanding the concepts and actions of a school with a PLC culture. If the ILT Team members rated the school with all ratings of 2 and 3, the school would be described as being in *early implementation*, meaning that the school was starting to understand the vision of the PLC culture. All ratings of 3 would mean that the school was in the implementation stage and was starting to change aspects of the school culture. Ratings of 3 and 4 would indicate that the school was in *late implementation*. Ratings of 4 and 5 would indicate that the school was in the *early institutionalization* of PLC culture in the school, and all ratings of 5 would be indicative of *full institutionalization*. Ratings including the word institutionalization would suggest that the school is starting or fully changed in the way business is done in that school. This would include the full standard operating procedures of all aspects of the five dimensions of PLCs.

If the ratings of the ILT spanned four numbers on the Likert Scale, then it would be interpreted as meaning that there was extensive disagreement about the progress the school had made in establishing a culture of PLCs. These overall ratings were entered into the NVivo database as an attribute. The attribute was titled *PLC status*.

Analysis of Extensiveness of District Actions

The second ISP individual survey item requested that all ILT members individually rate ten different district actions/strategies for their level or extensiveness of use by the district leadership team (CILT) over the first two years of the district initiative. The ten district actions are as follows:

1. Reorganization of system, time, or school structures; reassignment of staff; creation of supportive structures of some type to support school work on professional learning communities;
2. Allocating resources of people, materials, or special forms of funding;
3. Defining vision, values, and beliefs about the value and elements of professional learning communities;
4. Assessing the needs of the district, schools, or staff via data gathering and analyzing gathered data to develop/refine the change initiative over time;
5. Defining and communicating expectations;
6. Defining priorities within the change initiative and maintaining focus on the desired changes;
7. Providing training and professional development;
8. Communicate vision messages to school administrators and system staff to continue clarification of the vision held by leadership;
9. Monitoring and oversight of school or system progress and actions, and

10. Defining roles and responsibilities for ILT members, central office staff, and others.

Each individual ILT member was asked to rate each of the ten actions as not used at all (0), used a little (L), or used a lot (A). The ILT pattern of responses could emerge to be all (0)'s, meaning that there was perfect agreement that the action was not taken. The pattern could emerge that all ILT members rated the action(s) as all (L)'s, meaning that there was perfect agreement that the action was taken a little or a pattern could emerge that all ILT team members rated the action as all (A)'s, meaning that there was perfect agreement that the action was taken a lot.

An analysis of the results of the ISP item asking for the ILT members to rate the actions as being not taken (NT), taken a little (L), or taken a lot (A), was conducted to check for the level of agreement among the various members of the ILT. Displays were developed to show the level of agreement of each school ILT on each of the ten district actions.

It was assumed that perfect agreement of all ILT members ratings on any one action would not occur. Decision rules were developed to compile the agreement ratings of individual team members into one overall rating of the team for each action. For cases in which the ILT members differed in their ratings, the following decision rules were used. A rating of *high agreement* would be used if all members of the ILT agreed, regardless of whether their ratings were all (NT), all (L), or all (A). Moderate agreement would be the overall rating if the ratings were mixed. However, for a moderate agreement there could only be two types of ratings with one being dominant. For example, ratings of (L), (L), (A), (L), (A), (L) would be considered moderate agreement. Low agreement would be the team indicator if there were ratings of all types on a district

action from one ILT team. Several types of disagreement would result from the compiled team ratings. The decision rules indicated that several types of overall ratings of *disagreement* would be indicated if the following conditions existed in the individual ratings:

- D₁ if the ratings were polarized and split as (0) and (A);
- D₂ if there was a split between the number of (L) and (A) individual ratings; or
- D₃ if all ratings were of one type with the exception of one outlier that was different than the others.

Decision rules were also developed to compile the overall rating of extensiveness of use that resulted from the perceptions of the ILT members. In the second review, the ratings of the individual team members were compiled based on whether they perceived the action to be not taken (0), taken a little (L), or taken a lot (A). The decision rules indicated that an overall rating of action not taken (NT) would be determined under the following conditions:

- All ILT members rated the action as (0);
- The majority of team members rated the action as (0) with one or two ratings of (L); or
- Team members rated the actions as (0) and only one (A) was indicated.

Overall ratings of *low extensiveness* of use were determined under an overall rating of (NT).

Also considered a *low use* rating was the following:

- If the team members all rated the action as (L);

- If the team members all rated the action as mostly (L) with only one (A) or one (0);

The rating of *moderate extensiveness of use* was determined if the ILT members rated the action as:

- Evenly mixed (L) and (A) ratings; or
- Mixed ratings of (L), (A), and one (0).

An *extensiveness of use* rating was determined under the following conditions:

- All team ratings were (A);
- Mixed ratings of (A) and (L) with more (A) ratings; or
- Mostly (A), with one (L) and one (0).

When considering the extensiveness of use decision, all ILT team overall ratings were low, moderate, or high extensiveness of use when compiled. No ratings of disagreement were used when the decision of extensiveness of use was determined.

Analysis of Helpfulness of District Actions

The third and final individual ISP survey item asked each member of the school ILT to rate the degree of help each of the ten district actions had in supporting the ILT's efforts to establish a PLC culture in their school. Each ILT member was given the list of ten actions and asked to rank each from 1-10, with 1 being the most helpful action and 10 being the least helpful. Team members were given the option of rating an action as not taken (NT), which provides for consistency given the previous survey item allowing them to rate actions as not used (0). An assumption was made that all ILT members at the same school would not totally agree on a helpfulness rating. Decision rules were developed to address the differences in ILT Team ratings. The first review of the third

ISP item was conducted to consider the degree to which the ILT members agreed on their perceptions of helpfulness. The following decision rules were defined for this rating on overall agreement:

- Perfect agreement would be rated as *high* in the overall agreement rating;
- Ratings of perceived helpfulness that were in adjoining categories, for example helpful and moderately helpful, or moderately helpful and not helpful, would be given an overall rating of *moderate* overall agreement; or
- Ratings that are in all three types of agreement were rated as *low agreement*.

Actions were rated as *disagreement* if the rules above could not be applied. Different types of disagreement ratings were assigned as follows:

- The ratings of the ILT members were polarized as either 1, 2, 3 and 8, 9, or 10 = D₁;
- The ratings of the ILT members were split evenly in the three number sets for *helpful*, *moderately helpful*, or *not helpful* (two of three categories, but two contiguous categories) = D₂; or
- Only one ILT member rated the item in a different helpfulness category than the other ILT members (one outlier) = D₃.

Helpfulness of actions was rated according to the following rules:

- If the action was rated as 1, 2, or 3 by all ILT members it was given an overall rating of helpful;
- If the action was rated as 4, 5, 6, or 7 by all ILT members it was given an overall rating of moderately helpful;
- If the action was rated as 8, 9, or 10 by all ILT members it was given an overall rating of not helpful;

- If the action was rated as both helpful and moderately helpful, then the final rating was moderately helpful;
- For mixed ratings, the dominant perception was given as the overall rating;
- If the action was rated equally mixed, then a disagreement rating was given; or
- If individual ILT members rated an action as (NT) or failed to rate an individual action (indicated as -), then that rating was considered to have the effect of a negative skew on the other ratings. The final helpfulness rating would, therefore, be more toward the not helpful side.

The data reduction methods described above permitted large amounts of data to be reduced to reveal summary data displays. The summary data displays permitted analysis of response patterns across the ten schools (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Computer-Assisted Data Analysis

The use of computer-assisted data analysis permits effective qualitative analysis in efficient, consistent, and systematic ways (Gibbs, 2002). QSR NVivo software for qualitative data analysis was used to analyze the transcripts from the structured interviews with school-based ILTs. Each school interview transcript was first coded using the District Action Conceptual Framework (*Figure 2.1*), which served as a heuristic for coding. The coding categorized the comments from the participants of the interviews by district actions of reorganization, resource allocation, defining vision/values, defining expectations, defining priorities and maintaining focus, data use/initiative development, monitoring and oversight, communicating vision messages, or defining roles and responsibilities.

Following the initial district action coding, a second coding strategy was developed to indicate which of the PLC dimensions were evident in interview comments. The PLC dimension coding specified dimensions such as shared leadership, collective learning and application, supportive conditions, shared vision and values, and shared personal practice. Other codes evolved as a result of repeated review of the transcripts. Examples of such themes include CILT, ILT, opportunities for improvement, assistant principal, or superintendent. Coding in NVivo permitted the use of a systematic data development and analysis system.

During the process of gathering and organizing the data the investigator engaged in memoing to compile thoughts that were later incorporated into the findings or interpretation of the evidence. Memoing was used in several situations throughout the gathering of data. First, memoing occurred as all archival documents are filed into the timeline and decision patterns. This supported later reflections of the investigator. Memos were coded in NVivo, allowing code reports to integrate both interview transcripts and memos.

The NVivo program supported the examination of data relationships in the text and the development of ideas and interpretations. The data for each school were entered into the NVivo project file one at a time, creating a separate document for each transcript of project memo. Basic demographic data were entered for each school as separate attributes. Different values were entered for each school to depict their status within each attribute. Demographic data elements used for attributes are displayed in Appendix I.

Attributes were later used to sort schools by characteristics and to filter other data strands according to attribute and coding. Attribute data were used to divide coded passages in the interview transcripts or memos by type of school, ratings of helpfulness,

etc. Attributes supported the sorting of other linked data according to the level of schooling – elementary, middle, or high. Interpretations and conclusions were supported through the solid grounding in the data without bias in selection of data elements.

NVivo was used to support several aspects of data analysis. First, the data from the School as Learning Organization survey was reduced to a low or high readiness rating and entered as an attribute for each of the ten study schools. Second, the data from the ILT Progress Surveys (ISP) were entered as attributes for the following: (a) School progress rating for PLCs; (b) summary ratings for extent of use for each district action, and (c) summary ratings for helpfulness of each district action. Third, the text files from the structured interview transcripts were uploaded into the project file of NVivo and coded to allow the use of filtering processes.

Memos created from the review of archival documents were also uploaded into the NVivo project file. Documents such as memos and lengthy interview transcript passages were reduced or linked to preserve a noted relationship and support the testing of a theory. When coding interview data or memo documents, the coding is supported by multiple reviews of the documents, namely reading and coding identified passages and conducting a word or descriptor “find.” NVivo allows the researcher to tag all of the words located through the “find” search together for later reference. Boolean and proximity searches were also conducted to assure that all references to a theme or topic were analyzed.

The data entered into the NVivo project file for this study were analyzed by asking questions and conducting searches with the aid of the software. Sample questions explored were, “What did the participants at the interviews say about the district action of *defining priorities and maintaining focus*?” or “What actions did low readiness PLC

schools view as helpful?” Finally, the project software revealed patterns of responses by allowing for case-by-case comparisons. Frequency tallies of responses or ratings across schools were displayed for analysis.

All aspects of data were analyzed as a single case. Cross-case analysis was conducted using Boolean and proximity search procedures in NVivo. Contextual understanding of the search procedures were enhanced by linking the query results to passages from the interview transcripts.

Standards of Quality

A case study approach to research requires that the process be considered within the frame of a set of standards of quality. Miles and Huberman (1994) presented a set of quality standards that were considered in designing this study. The standards that will be discussed include credibility, transferability, dependability, trustworthiness, and confirmability. A brief description of each standard will be provided in this section.

Credibility

When reviewing a study for the quality standard of credibility one must consider if the study findings make sense. Did the researcher authentically describe what was being studied? Credibility or internal validity was addressed in this study through the use of rich descriptions of the artifacts and district actions described in artifact memos. The use of the rich wording of the reform implementers during the structured interviews provides a ring of truth and a “vicarious presence” for the reader (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 279).

The inclusion of the local context provides a further richness to the understandings offered to the reader. Case studies are limited by methods of data

collections, sample populations, and analytic processes. All three of these were considered in developing the methodology of this study. The multiple points of data gathered during this study improved the confidence of the researcher in determining findings and conclusions.

The use of critical friends who are intimately familiar with both the implementation of the initiative, the various types of data used from the archival records, and the interpretation I made of the data provided a means of verifying my interpretations. These critical friends had no obligation to me as we reviewed the data and they were able to provide independent interpretations of my analyses.

My motivation in the interpretation of the data gathered guided me to develop useful conclusions and recommendations for future actions of the District with the intention of continuing the self-study actions the District has utilized thus far in the context of the initiative. The experience of conducting this study allowed the CILT to become more skillful in self-study efforts.

Using multiple points of data collection, such as the archival documents that were developed further through the *memo to self* process, the various survey data, and the structured interview analysis using NVivo software enabled me to conduct a systematic review of data by relating quantitative data with the qualitative data. The district's use of facilitators during the structured interview process separated the CILT from the process of gathering the data and thus ensured that interview participants did not feel cautious in making responses. In my secondary analysis of the transcripts of these interviews, the combination of positive and negative comments suggested that participants felt comfortable in expressing their views.

Transferability

When considering the contributions of studies one typically considers a standard for the transferability of findings. Can the conclusions of the study have a larger use beyond informing the investigator and the study sample? Although external validity is often an area of criticism with case study research (Yin, 2003), the variety of data that were gathered in this study allowed greater transference than a single data form, such as survey results. The embedded nature of the sampling permitted comparison of patterns across schools within the study to determine the scope of transferability beyond the district selected and the schools within the district. The patterns of perceived district actions and their impact on the schools were developed from the eight school samples. The responses from ILT interviews were compared and themes that emerged were tested across the ten school sites. Peculiarities noted were investigated against common demographic elements to determine if patterns were noted within certain attribute characteristics. The interpretation of the findings of the study considered all possible explanations for the patterns noted, including other school factors that have influenced the impact of decision actions of District leadership.

Dependability

Reliability seeks to ensure that the methods of the study can be repeated with the same results being obtained (Yin, 2003). Miles and Huberman (1994) described dependability as whether or not the study has been done with reasonable care. Dependability should also minimize any biases within the study design and implementation. To ensure dependability, protocols were developed for the archival document review by the investigator. Use of the NVivo software adds to the reasonable care given to data reduction and analysis processes. The archival documents and

computer-aided search questions were aligned with the central research questions of the study. The dependability of the analysis was increased by the specification of two conceptual framings: the District Action Concept Framework; and the Social Systems Model for Schools. Coding processes and searches were cross-checked by a critical friend.

Trustworthiness

Utilization and action orientation are terms used to pragmatically describe the trustworthiness of a study. The notion of what the study does for the consumer and how that consumer is better able to negotiate the real world as a result of the study is relevant here (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study has a clearly defined audience, those who are interested in actions of school districts and how others might perceive those actions. The findings of the study provide a reasonable place for readers to begin to take some future action based on understandings gained herein. They also guide others to consider aspects of related investigation for future research. Finally, the focus of the study addresses a current real world problem to which others can connect and relate. This affords multiple possible readers perspective on the topic, research process, and connections to their work. An assumption was made that if District staff, engaged in the change to a culture of inquiry, found that progress in developing PLCs was possible, then others may see the possibilities in the development of PLCs.

Approval of the Study

Prior to beginning this study a proposal was reviewed with the District Supervisor of Research and Evaluation and with a subcommittee of the Board of Education. Both

approved the study. The President of the Board provided written permission to use school system data.

Ethical Issues

Substantial reflection on the ethical issues of this study was conducted. It is imperative that the identities of the schools and interview participants be protected. If one considers the ethical theory of “beneficence,” maximizing good outcomes for the educational leaders, the study contributes to the capacity outcomes for the participants who produced the primary data re-analyzed for purposes of this study. Miles and Huberman (1994) raised the question, “Is this study worth doing?” As the researcher, this study could be viewed as opportunistic for me. The motivation of wanting to provide effective leadership to the District in which I serve as superintendent is sincere. The desire for the District to operate in a culture of inquiry is authentic. With the support of critical friends, the study was of good quality. The review by the sub-committee of the Board and approval by the total Board offers the voice of trust from a District stakeholder. Members of the CILT have reviewed and used portions of the data, analysis, and findings to build on and refine their work.

I collaborated with participants who served as critical friends. This relationship avoided imposition, and too much detachment. These collaborators served as critical friends, who engaged in a confirmatory process following data analysis and identification of findings. Each party involved in the study gained from their participation.

A second ethical issue of bias of the researcher has also been addressed in the design of the study. The primary area of avoiding bias needing attention was that of the investigator being in a prominent leadership role in the studied District. Some elements of bias have been avoided in that the focal topic of this study was determined after the

inception of the district initiative. The investigator is not the sole decision maker on the CILT, and in fact is dependent on the decisions made by other CILT members to support schools in the development of PLCs across the district. Past implementation research would suggest that the decisions made by leadership must be implemented with fidelity at other levels of the organization if the initiative is to be sustained and institutionalized.

The use of the NVivo software provided for a detailed systematic methodology to the data analysis. The data captured what might be viewed as positive and negative reactions to District action. This suggested that there was truth to the contributions of the participants and that they did not feel coerced or threatened. The positive contributions that the study has made on the quality of discussions and intentional planning leads me to believe that there was no cost to the participants.

Summary Comments

Recent research has emphasized the promise of PLCs as an approach to improving student achievement. This study began to explore the potential links between district actions and reactions of schools. It revealed several important issues that must be further explored to continue to learning about the impact of PLCs on achievement. The influence of *NCLB* has served as a triggering event to urge districts to a new level of effort in designing lasting and adaptive reform strategies. This study argues that PLCs and the culture of a learning organization have the power to produce lasting change in classroom practice, while intellectually engaging administrators and teachers.

Chapter 4: Suburban District Context

Overview of Chapter

This study investigated the role of the district in school reform as one suburban district attempts to establish professional learning communities (PLCs) in all schools of the District. The reform initiative was conceived in response to the need to improve student achievement and a belief that student learning occurs best in environments where teachers and other adults are learning. This retrospective case study explored the first two years of how one suburban district influenced the development of (PLCs) across all schools in the District through the actions and decisions of the superintendent and central District leadership. In order to respond to the central research questions of the study, actions that the District took in influencing the development of PLCs across all schools were explored. How individual school instructional leaders perceived the impact of certain District actions on developing PLCs in their school was examined.

The study is written in my voice as the superintendent. As a result, personal insights are shared throughout the study findings and discussion that would ordinarily not be available. Artifact memos were developed following each document review as personal reflections of District actions that could be documented by agendas, minutes, and other printed materials. These memos represented only those District actions that were solidly documented. I acknowledge that they represent only some of the events that were involved in the District initiative during the period of the study. These artifact memos provided reviews of my perspectives on events.

As the superintendent of the Suburban District, I participated in the actions and decisions of the District as the initiative to develop PLCs was planned and implemented. The study focused on two years of the district initiative, each lasting approximately one

school year. The first year of the initiative occurred during the 2002-2003 school year. This year was considered the planning and preparation year. The second year of the initiative, occurring during the 2003-2004 school year, was the first full year of the implementation of the PLC initiative. The study was a retrospective case study of these two phases of the Suburban School District's initiative to create district-wide school-based professional learning communities.

This chapter presents a brief review of the social system conceptual model introduced in Chapter 2 and applied in the analyses that begins in this chapter. I will re-introduce each of the social system elements and describe the district demographics related to the Suburban District. Beginning with the section on staffing structures, some of the actions taken as planning and preparation phase strategies will be discussed. Archival survey data from the Suburban District cultural context is presented. Descriptions of additional District actions and choices will be presented in the chapters that follow.

Conceptual Framework

School districts, like many large organizations, make decisions and take action within active environments that are complex and dynamic. Acknowledging this creates the need for case study researchers to use a conceptual model that focuses attention on the internal social systems of the organization under study. The conceptual model used in this study allows comparisons over time, including follow-up studies of other stages of the District's initiative. This case study utilized the social-systems model presented in Chapter 2 as a heuristic to gain perspective on the activities that occurred during the two year period of study. This model views an organization as being both influenced by and

dependent on the environment within which it operates (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). The survival of a social systems organization requires that it adapt and change in ways that improve its operations. The Suburban District designed a systemic improvement initiative to develop professional learning communities across all schools. The actions of the district were reviewed in the context of this heuristic.

The social system has multiple systems that interact to acquire inputs and then transform them into desired outputs. The Suburban District, that is the subject of this case study, operates as an open social system. *Figure 4.1* illustrates the inter-related systems of the district social system model utilized for the analysis of the case study.

In the exploration of the key research questions of the study, the application of the conceptual model asked about what actions and choices the District took to enhance the transformational process of creating PLCs in all schools. The study also explored how these actions were perceived by key leadership personnel as they took school-level actions to implement PLCs.

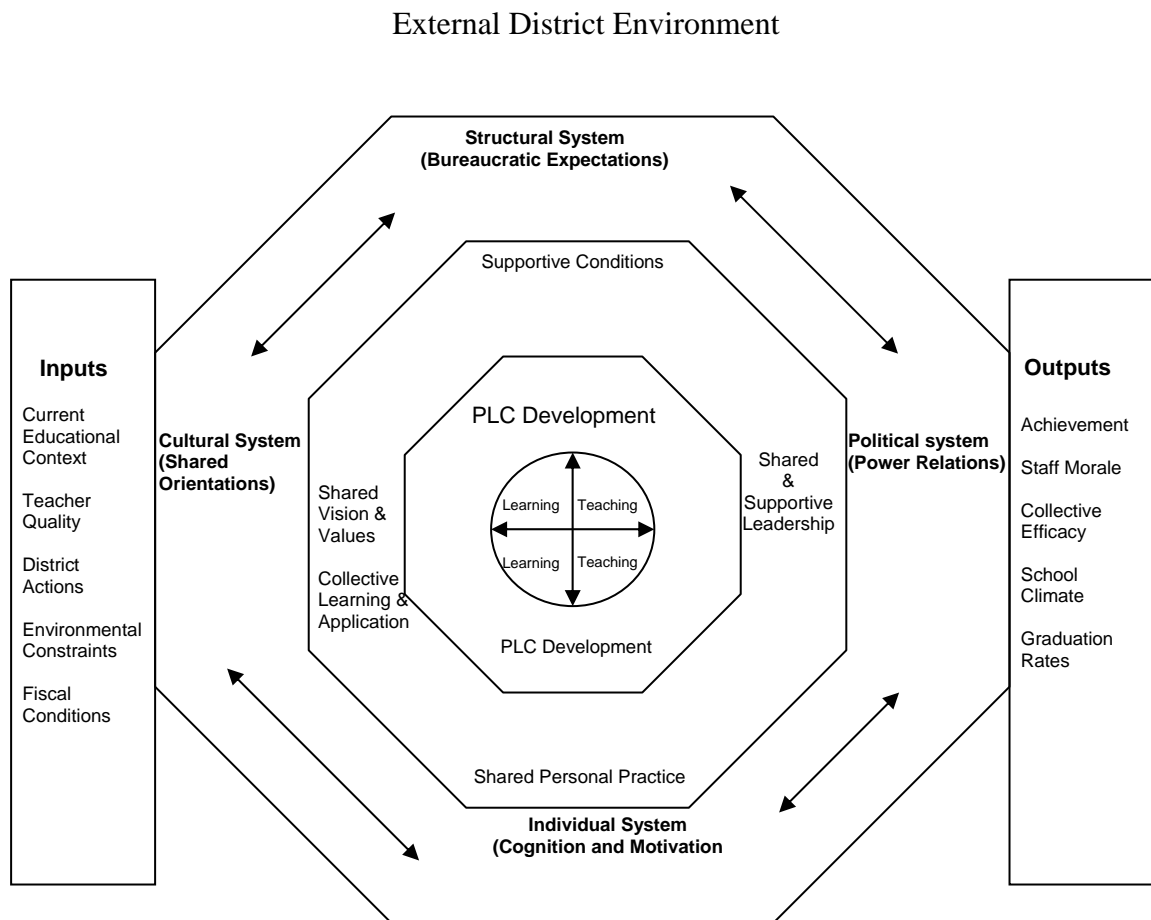


Figure 4.1 Social Systems Model for District and School Professional Learning Communities (Adapted from Hoy & Miskel, 2005)

The Suburban County School District

Student Population

As a result of County housing growth, the District had experienced growth in student enrollment. During the early 1990s the District grew by approximately 1,000 students per year. In 1995 the Suburban District had an enrollment of 35,963. On September 30, 2004, enrollment was 40,252 full-time equivalent students enrolled in pre-kindergarten to grade 12. In the 2004-2005 school year the system was comprised of 32 elementary schools, eight middle schools, eight comprehensive high schools, one technical magnet high school, one special education school, and one building that housed

secondary alternative education programs and virtual coursework labs. In 2005 the District was the seventh largest of the 24 districts in the state.

The 40,252 students were comprised of 79.2% White students (District range 35.4% - 98.9% of schools), 15.5% African-American students (District range 0% - 57% of schools), and 5.3% Other Non-White students (District range <1% - 15.9% of schools). Two of the most important characteristics of personal demographics correlating to student achievement are poverty and language proficiency. Students sharing these demographic profiles are considered at risk for academic failure and frequently require support to reach achievement levels set for academic standards. Generally, the most reliable measure of poverty in school districts is the per cent of students eligible for free and reduced meal prices (FARMS). As of September 2004, students qualifying for free meals could not have family incomes that exceeded \$24,505 for a family of four. Students qualifying for reduced price meals could not exceed a family income of \$34,873 for a family of four. As of September 2004, 17.5% (District range 3.1% - 77.1%) of Suburban District students were eligible for free or reduced meals. According the projections provided by the Suburban District Office of Food and Nutrition, by September 2005, approximately 19.5% of students in the District would be eligible for FARMS.

External Environment

At the time of this study conditions were present that created demands on the District to be more accountable and efficient. The federal demands resulting from the *NCLB Act* set academic and other performance expectations. State legislation required that the Master Plan include District efforts to improve instruction and student outcomes in core subjects and in career and technology programs, courses in the arts, and in

multicultural education. The citizens wanted a Plan with long-range vision. The cost of these new demands strained the already scarce resources of the Suburban District, which was reported as the district with the lowest per pupil expenditure in the state. Although the state and local elected officials realized that new requirements existed and were federally or state mandated, the concerns they expressed concerned whether the local Board of Education and the District Superintendent efficiently spent the funding provided.

District leaders faced dual demands from the newly legislated requirements to meet AYP and the demands of a parent population with expectations for high achieving schools, high quality school facilities, and specialized programs for students with all types of needs. Parents expected elected officials to provide the resources needed for the District to provide these programs. However, at the time of the study, the operating budget needs of the District exceeded allocated resources. For two years there had been no funding to employ additional teachers to serve the growing student population. Nor had the District's capital budget needs been met. Some District schools had large numbers of relocatable classrooms, and many schools were in need of modernization. Within this environment the District began a major cultural change initiative that affected how teachers approached their work.

District Staffing Structures

Prior to the time bounding this study, the existing organizational structure was set forth in 1997 under the leadership of a prior superintendent. The organizational structure at that time had five assistant superintendents, three of whom had primarily operational responsibilities and two with school or instructionally-related oversight. All assistant superintendents reported directly to the superintendent. The assistant superintendents

supervised the areas of Curriculum and Instruction, Education Services, Business Services, Human Resources, and Operations.

In 2002 the District undertook the completion of a performance audit to assess the overall operations and efficiency of the District. As reported in the MGT of America study (2002), the District's existing administrative structure created overlap and duplication of effort in central office responsibilities with regard to leadership of instructional issues and school improvement. Under this structure the Directors of Secondary and Elementary Education reported to an Assistant Superintendent of Education Services who ultimately had oversight of all 51 schools. The Assistant Superintendent of Education Services had no direct funding oversight for the schools. The organizational structure prior to the period of this study also included an Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction to whom all central office content and instructional supervisors reported. This person had control and responsibility for all curricular and instructional funding, as well as all grants relating to the schools or instruction. Under this structure there was no Deputy Superintendent or other individual to whom the assistant superintendents could go for decision-making when day-to-day issues arose. Interview and survey data from the MGT Study revealed that the school-based administrators found this organizational structure confusing and causing mixed messages from central office staff to school administrators.

In central office the number of content staff had grown since the inception of a State School Performance Assessment Program (SSPAP) in 1992. In addition, there were teacher specialists who served in the central office for many content areas. Teacher specialists were best described as master teachers and were not considered administrators. These teacher specialists assisted with curriculum development, staff development, and in

the preparation of instructional materials. Most of the teacher specialists had been selected on the basis of the high quality instruction they provided in their own classrooms. These specialists were not assigned to regular work with teachers in pursuit of improved classroom practice.

Content specific supervisors and assistant supervisors were present in the central office for each subject area. These staff members provided content observations as a service in all schools. Teachers were also observed by the principal or assistant principal, but with less frequency than the central office supervisors. This pattern of instructional interaction led to a perception that principals had less knowledge and skill in leading instructional improvements than the building-based administrators. However, the total accountability responsibility rested with the building principal. This difference in perception caused some conflicts between school-based administrators and central office administrators.

The organizational structure that existed at the executive level at the beginning of this study period was first proposed for reconfiguration in 2002 (MGT of America, 2002), with the elimination of the position of Assistant Superintendent of Education Services and the creation of the position of Chief of Administration. This new Chief of Administration would be someone who would report to the Superintendent of Schools and be responsible for the operational issues of the District before they would come to the superintendent. The Assistant Superintendents of Business Services, Operations, and Human Resources would report to the Chief. The Executive Directors for Elementary and Secondary Education and the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction would continue to report directly to the Superintendent. The Chief of Administration position went unfilled until the January 2004, when a candidate from another school

system was hired for the position. The organizational structure that was in place by June 2003 is presented in Appendix J.

The District redefined the division of labor and role specializations at the executive or senior staff level. First, some assistant superintendents or directors who previously reported directly to the superintendent were directed to report to the Chief of Administration. This change in reporting targets caused some concern among the Assistant Superintendents and Directors. Some felt that they had lost their line of direct contact with the superintendent. They felt that another layer of decision-making had been placed between them and the superintendent. Many continued to come directly to see the superintendent when they felt that something was important. They were redirected to the Chief of Administration. In some ways this relatively large school District continued to attempt to operate like a much smaller district.

Cultural System

Prior to the period of change that was investigated in this study, the presence of a culture of autonomy existed in most District schools meaning that teachers did not commonly observe each other's work. At the same time, teachers in the District generally reported that they believed that they had abilities to positively influence student achievement.

In August 2003, the District used the School As a Learning Organization Instrument (SLO) to survey all teachers to assess their perceptions of the readiness of their schools to become professional learning communities. Included in this survey were four items that asked teachers about their perception of the extent of collective efficacy in their schools. Teachers were asked if they felt able to effectively meet the instructional

needs of their students and if they felt that their colleagues had the skills to meet the needs of their students.

The findings of this study revealed that the prevailing norm of teacher autonomy was reflected in the lower means on the Shared Personal Practice Dimension of the School as Learning Organization (SLO) instrument. Table 4.1 summarizes the data on teachers' perceptions of school readiness for professional learning communities. Confirming evidence was sought in the archival documents of the District. After reviewing the professional development documents from the *Lessons From the Field* training dealing with walkthroughs, I wrote an artifact memo that stated, "Some of the teachers, particularly at the high school level, were extremely intimidated by this walkthrough experience. At one high school several teachers locked their classroom doors so that the visiting team could not enter their rooms. When the visitors jiggled the classroom door handle, they were ignored. This behavior informed the principal about the level of trust and openness in the school" (Haas, 2004).

Table 4.1

Elementary Teacher Perceptions of School Readiness for PLCs N= 1,021

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Shared Supportive Leadership(*10)	7.65	1.41	6.26	8.49
Shared Values and Vision(*15)	12.68	1.79	10.98	14.04
Collective Learning & Application(*25)	20.04	2.75	17.82	22.42
Shared Personal Practice(*10)	5.66	2.05	3.88	7.16
Supportive Conditions(*25)	19.66	3.57	16.77	21.83
All PLC Dimensions(*85)	65.70	8.59	56.35	71.89
Data from Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas (2005) *Total for Dimension or Instrument				

Middle School Teacher Perceptions of School Readiness for PLCs N= 460

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Shared Supportive Leadership(*10)	6.96	1.60	5.86	7.95
Shared Values and Vision(*15)	11.67	2.11	10.02	12.96
Collective Learning & Application(*25)	18.68	3.06	17.00	20.35
Shared Personal Practice(*10)	5.45	2.00	4.56	6.18
Supportive Conditions(*25)	18.42	3.57	15.61	21.14
All PLC Dimensions(*85)	61.19	10.32	53.12	68.37
Data from Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas (2005) *Total for Dimension or Instrument				

High School Teacher Perceptions of School Readiness for PLCs N= 643

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Shared Supportive Leadership(*10)	6.95	1.62	5.51	7.89
Shared Values and Vision(*15)	11.10	2.17	9.48	12.17
Collective Learning & Application(*25)	17.19	3.38	15.12	18.45
Shared Personal Practice(*10)	5.26	1.94	4.55	5.80
Supportive Conditions(*25)	16.65	3.63	14.82	17.89
All PLC Dimensions(*85)	57.18	10.32	51.34	60.90
Data from Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas (2005) *Total for Dimension or Instrument				

An analysis of the collective efficacy items was conducted by Mawhinney, Wood, and Haas (2005) to assess the beginning status of collective efficacy in the District and to begin to explore how this concept related to the desired culture changes that were the

focus of the Suburban District reform efforts. These findings are reported here as descriptive of the beginning status as the period of this study began.

<i>School Level</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.Score</i>	<i>Max. Score</i>
Elementary	14.99	2.32	13.20	16.21
Middle	13.83	2.81	12.30	15.16
High	12.58	2.83	11.17	13.48
All Levels	14.01	2.79	-	-

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 4.2 provide means and standard deviations of teachers' ratings on five-point Likert scales for summed collective efficacy (CE) items. Mean ratings of teachers in elementary schools were higher for Collective Efficacy Beliefs. Associated standard deviations were lower (Mawhinney, Wood & Haas, 2005). Data suggest that teachers' perceptions of collective efficacy and readiness for professional learning communities in their schools are related to school.

Elementary teachers report higher perceptions of collective efficacy and school culture conducive to supporting a professional learning community than middle or high school teachers. Furthermore, perceptions generally tend to be more diverse among middle and high school teachers compared to elementary teachers (Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas, 2005). When the relationship between collective efficacy beliefs and perceptions of conditions of readiness as a professional learning community are explored, the data suggest that Suburban District teachers' perceptions of collective efficacy and their perceptions of conditions supporting PLCs are moderately to substantially related, and all are positive (significant at the .01 level) (Mawhinney, Wood & Haas, 2005).

The examination of cultural system data revealed that there were widely divergent cultural orientations among and within school staffs (Appendix I). The few shared orientations that could be documented appeared to result from district structured events

and processes over many years rather than deeply valued beliefs among teachers about the students the District served.

Teacher Characteristics

The individual system of the District can also be examined from the perspective of the individual characteristics of teachers of the 51 schools. Those characteristics are summarized in the table in Appendix E. The percentage of teachers holding conditional certificates at each school was examined. In general, the percentage at any one school was low; however, the percentage of teachers holding conditional certificates ranged from 0 to 10%. Teachers with conditional certificates were highest in secondary schools and in special education.

The *NCLB Act* requires that each teacher be “highly qualified.” To meet this definition according to federal standards, teachers are required to have a Bachelors’ or Masters’ degree in the subject or core area of certification, must take and pass the Praxis I and II for basic skills and content knowledge, and must meet all certification requirements for the state in which the person works. In 2003- 2004, at the time of this study, the districts in the state were given updated data on their progress in meeting this requirement. These data were released in the form of the percentage of classes being taught by teachers who were not highly qualified. The percentage of classes in schools across the Suburban District taught by teachers that were not highly qualified ranged from 3.2% to 40.4%.

Some of the descriptors of the teaching staff are included in the table in Appendix I. These demographics can be considered from the perspective of the knowledge and motivations of the collective and individual staff members. Analysis of District staff data show that there was a significant range across schools in the percentage of teachers that

held a teaching certificate identified by the state as an Advanced Professional Certificate (APC). Holding an APC can be interpreted as an indicator that those teachers typically had at least three years of satisfactory full-time teaching experience and a base of content knowledge in their field. APC holders must have a master's degree or a master's equivalency, which is 36 post-baccalaureate credits. The proportion of APC holders across all Suburban County Schools ranged from a low of 28.8% to a high of 81.8%. This suggests that at least 71.2% of teachers in a school had less than three years of teaching experience. The District trend mirrors the patterns that are discussed in the literature – the more challenging the student population in a school, the less experience the teaching staff had in that school.

Closing

In this chapter the social system model for organizations was utilized to examine the contextual environments of the County and District. Within this context the District implements actions and strategies focused on achieving the goal of implementing PLCs across all schools. While it was impossible to capture all actions taken during the period of the study, actions are revealed through documents and other forms of evidence. Chapter 5 will describe an array of actions that addressed the PLC innovation.

Chapter 5: District Actions to Develop Professional Learning Communities

Chapter Overview

This retrospective case study analyzed the actions of District leadership as they planned and initiated a reform program that sought to implement professional learning communities (PLCs) in all schools as a means of continuous improvement. The initiative set out to establish conditions in schools that would engage the entire staff and administration as they configured groups of professionals coming together to learn about how to improve student achievement.

The role of the district in establishing coherent and sustained reform initiatives gained attention in recent research (Fullan, 2001 and 2003; Massell, 2000; and Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Other research suggested that school-based PLCs held promise for creating the conditions for improved teacher practice and improved student learning. The Suburban School District determined that the implementation of a systemic approach to the establishment of PLCs was needed to provide the most effective and efficient district leadership to the reform effort.

Chapter 4 utilized the social system model to describe the contextual environments of the County and the District as the period of the study began. At the beginning of this chapter, I will describe some of the key actions and efforts taken by the District leadership as they carried out the planning and initiation of the PLC reform initiative. The actions described within the scope of this retrospective case study were documented through an analysis of District artifacts. The District actions described were the actual PLC reform initiative events. The analysis presented in Chapters 4-7 is the secondary analysis conducted for purposes of the study.

The initiative and its actions were described by the central District leadership as actions of either the planning year or implementation year within the two-year defined time bounding of this study. A complete chronological listing of actions documented through District artifacts is presented in Appendix F for the purposes of the secondary case study analysis. The key descriptive artifact data presented in this chapter will be followed by data that are summative analytic findings concerning the District's actions to implement PLCs. The perceptions of school-based leadership about the District's actions will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Determining a Reform Approach

The Basis of the Decision

With the enactment of the *NCLB Act* local school systems experienced an increased sense of urgency to improve the achievement of the students of their District. I felt a sense of urgency to consider past programs, implemented to improve achievement, and evaluate their success. As the Superintendent of Schools of the District in 2000, I directed the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction to convene a workgroup that would determine the most effective means of improving student learning and teacher instructional capacity. The resulting product of that 18 month effort was the Comprehensive Professional Development Plan (CPDP). This plan was presented to the Board of Education for review, consideration, and finally for approval. The approval of the Board was needed so that the plan received ongoing support and allocation of resources.

In early 2002 the Board of Education approved the (CPDP), which held as its central tenet job-embedded-professional development. The plan stated:

The need for ongoing training and support for new teachers, as well as experienced teachers, is clear and compelling. Thanks to research on effective teacher training practices, the traditional view of professional development as an event distant from the classroom is giving way to a view of professional development as a long-range activity, interwoven with the teacher's daily work. (p. I-2)

The plan further stated, "Teachers should be held accountable specifically for knowledge of their subject and teaching, for commitment to their students, for managing and monitoring student learning, and for active engagement with a learning community" (p. III-3). No specific action was documented to show that this plan had been intentionally moved forward following its approval in 2002. Schools were not intentionally incorporating professional development changes into the patterns of their school staff development activities. No modifications were done to the strategic plan to embed actions to move the CPDP forward. Yet, as the superintendent, I had a growing sense of urgency about the need for the District to become a learning organization in order to meet the needs of our students with changing and diverse needs. The desire to increase teacher instructional capacity was the top priority. This was, again, expressed in the CPDP (2002), which stated that, "teachers are expected to engage in continuous professional growth, to set personal professional goals and take action to achieve them, and to provide evidence of classroom application of their learning" (III-3). Stated very strongly in the plan was the priority set forth by the Board of Education that, "there is a moral imperative for the system to provide resources and technical assistance to teachers as a condition of their accountability for meeting standards" (p. III-4). The philosophy and strategies set forth in *Figure 5.1* was the framework of the Comprehensive Professional Development Plan (CPDP).

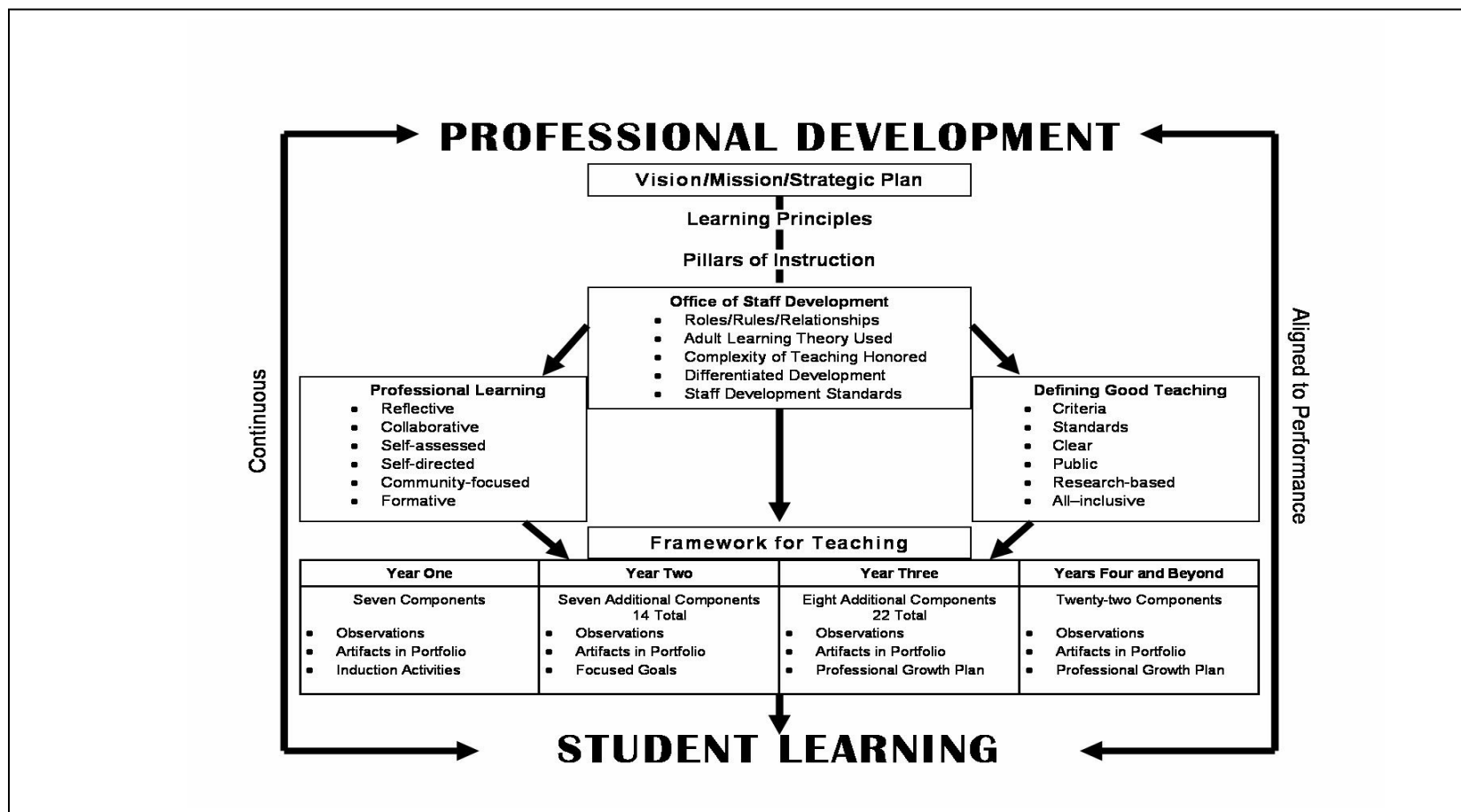


Figure 5.1 Suburban District Framework for Professional Development

The Plan defined how capacity improvements would be achieved so that the technical core of *Figure 4.1*, teaching and learning, could be achieved with coherence, while also addressing the structural, political, cultural, and individual system needs of the District and its instructional employees.

My review of the literature on PLCs revealed that successful schools exhibited many of the characteristics described in the District CPDP (Boyd, 1992; Boyd & Hord, 1994; Hord, 1997; Morrissey, 2000). As discussed in Chapter 2, research has shown that PLCs hold promise for creating the supportive organizational conditions for improvement in instructional capacity that can improve student achievement. Research on PLCs in individual schools suggested that these schools displayed characteristics conducive to effective change and improvement. However, I also found that there was little research documenting how districts as a whole might become PLCs, or how districts might engage in systemic reform to create school-based PLCs. To me, this underscored the importance of conducting ongoing research on the effects of the actions that were taken by the Suburban School District to become a PLC. Therefore, District research was a key feature of the two stages of the process that are the focus of this study.

Planning and Preparation for Improved Instructional Capacity

The first stage of this reform initiative, referred to in this study as the planning year, encompassed the year of planning and preparation for implementing PLCs in all schools across the District. The leaders of the system needed to develop supportive structures for the District and the schools to be able to begin the transformational process to PLCs. As the superintendent of the Suburban District, I made a decision to undertake the reform initiative as formalized research so that a model of effective PLC processes

and action research was provided to school and department leadership. This intentionally developed research initiative was a designed component of the District's efforts to become a learning organization. Prior to this, little action research or formalized research was conducted by the District. If the District was to move forward toward a deeply institutionalized culture of a learning organization, then formalizing some of the learning that occurs with the new PLC structure would be beneficial.

One of the basis for the research on this initiative was the I had read on case studies of the actions that were taken by districts as they provided leadership to systemic reform initiatives. The review of systemic reform case studies revealed that districts took specific actions in the process of developing and implementing their reform plans. I compiled a list of reported district actions and reflected on the actions utilized most frequently by the superintendents and their district leadership staff. The ten actions most reported are included in *Figure 5.2*. While many of the case studies reported in the literature focused on reform initiatives in reading or math, I believed that the culture needed to change to that of a learning organization. The focus of the initiative had to speak to teachers of every content area and discipline. Developing an initiative that achieved the goals set forth in the CPDP and sought to change the District culture to a learning organization achieved the goal of being applicable to all instructional staff. This was a transformational process-based initiative.

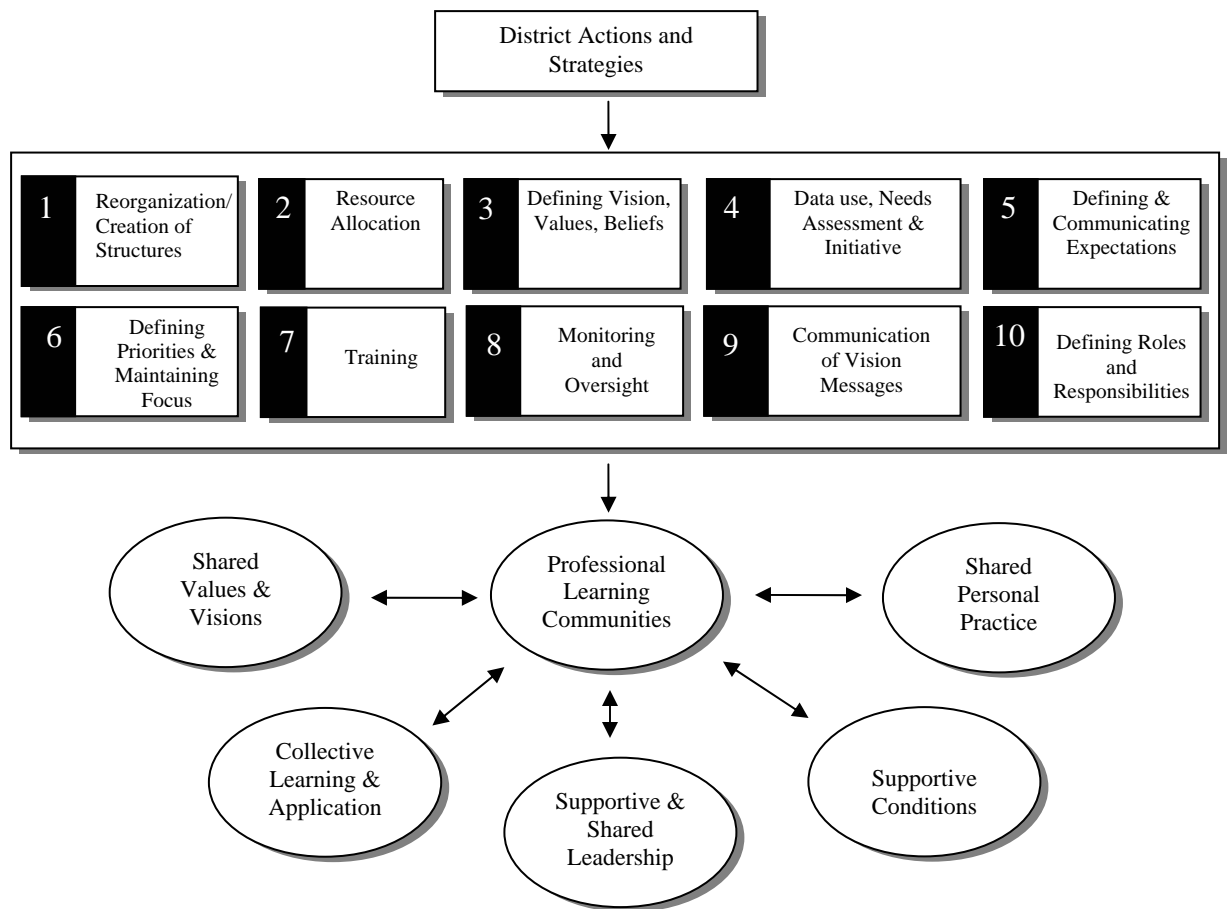


Figure 5.2 Conceptual Map of District Actions Leading to the Development of PLCs

Often during strategy planning sessions or progress discussions the District leadership discussed these reported actions, considering when and if they were selecting each as a potential effective action. Action strategies that were considered promising by the District leadership were selected as means to establish the organizational structures and other conditions found to be conducive to the development of PLCs in schools.

District actions were analyzed for their alignment with the conceptual map illustrated in *Figure 5.2*. In order to support the analysis of these actions, the framework was further adapted by overlaying the ten District actions gleaned from the literature review.

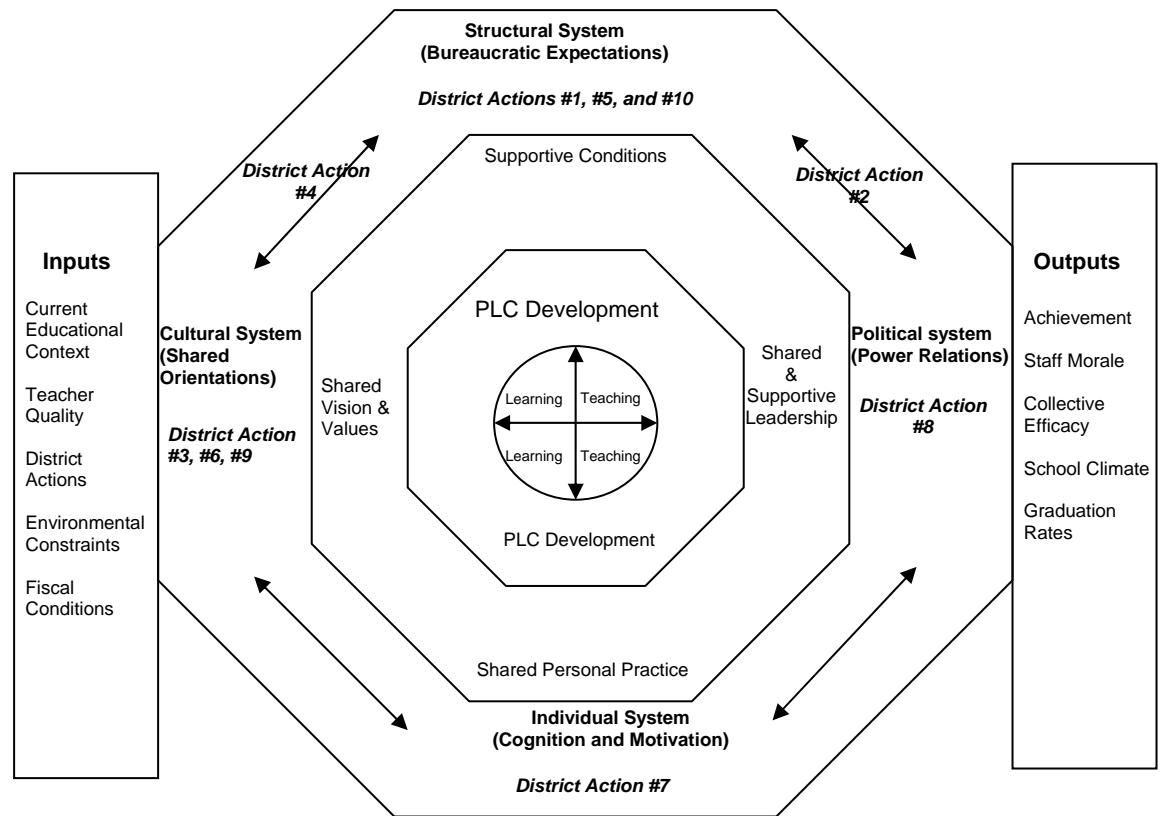


Figure 5.3 Social Systems Model with District Actions as Overlay
Adapted from Hoy and Miskel (2005)

The numbers on the adapted model correspond to the district actions listed below:

1. Reorganization of system, time, or schools; creation of supportive structures of some type to support the work of the schools on PLCs;
2. Resource allocation such as time, people, materials, or special forms of funding;
3. Defining vision and beliefs about the value of PLCs;
4. Assessing the needs of the schools or district and promoting the use of data;
5. Defining and communicating expectations for the schools;
6. Defining priorities and maintaining focus on the PLC initiative;
7. Providing training;

8. Monitoring and oversight of the school progress;
9. Communication of vision messages to school administrators and school staff;
and
10. Defining roles and responsibilities for the ILT Team members and the staff.

Planting the Seeds for a Professional Learning Community Initiative

In the spring of the 2001-2002 school year, as Superintendent I adopted the goal of creating PLCs, using as a guide for implementation of the Board approved CPDP. PLCs and the corresponding five dimensions served as a goal for systemic culture change. I viewed this PLC model as a means of achieving the transformational process presented in *Figure 5.3* with the district actions of *Figure 5.2*. The discussion and deployment process began with a session of the system's executive staff in the spring of 2002. Leading up to the actual initiative planning and preparation, I first sought to bring the senior staff to a level of agreement and support of the concept that the PLC structure was the most promising approach to create the continuous learning culture desired in the district. This served as the beginning of developing shared vision, values, and beliefs about the PLC culture.

Introduction of Professional Learning Community Model to Senior Staff

In April 2003, the senior staff of the district met in the former board room of the 1864 vintage office building. At the meeting I began a discussion about planning for the annual Leadership Conference that occurred each August. It was then April and there needed to be some thought given to the focus of the Leadership Conference. I asked the experienced district administrators if they recalled the year, probably 1992, when a

consultant presented a half-day workshop on the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM). A few of the staff recalled the training, and their job in the district at the time of the trainings, when I showed them the 1984 edition of the CBAM book. The staff briefly recalled the lack of follow-up and tried to recall who organized it and who was in charge when the training was scheduled. As they discussed the concept of change and what they recalled from the training in 1992, several staff members shared aspects of their knowledge of Senge's (2000) work on school learning organizations.

What followed was a discussion by the senior staff regarding their perceptions about the difficulties in creating change in school. Some senior staff members expressed their belief that the district leadership had a great deal of influence on what was given attention in the schools, thus leading to a sense of promise for change if actions were intentional.

The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction argued that until the leadership got serious and intentional about change, giving lots of time to planning, communicating, and follow-up, the district would not move forward with the improvement of teacher instructional capacity. Everyone quickly began talking about how it might look if the district leadership was intentional and focused in trying to create important change. No specific approach was defined during this discussion; however, the notion that the district leadership could do something important did become the consensus. At each subsequent senior staff meeting, planning for beginning the initiative followed, developing the approach that would be taken in implementing the initiative on PLCs. (Personal Note, Haas, 2002)

This was the first documented discussion about establishing a culture shift to that of a learning organization. On this date, the senior staff was given two books to read, *Implementing Change: Patterns, Principles, and Potholes* by Gene Hall and Shirley Hord (2001), and *Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998).

The shared District leadership decision to adopt the PLC framework as the District's reform initiative was ultimately an easy one. With my personal commitment to the model and the Board adopted CPDP as its basis, the senior staff, especially those in the instructional areas of the District's operations, openly supported the decision. Their reading of the two books resulted in discussions about the level of leadership skills required to supporting reform held by the District's school-based administrators.

Seeking the Best Organizational Structure

Although a great deal of discussion had occurred with select members of the senior staff of the District on reorganization concepts and using the existing employee resources to provide greater support to schools, there had not been discussion outside of our group. Knowing how important it was to gather the views and input of others, as the Superintendent, I issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for consultant services to facilitate a workgroup discussion of topics related to how to support schools and school-based staffs in their goal of improving student achievement and meeting the demands of *No Child Left Behind*. The decision to allocate resources to employ a consultant was based on my recognition of the importance of having everyone heard equally, regardless of position or status.

The RFP resulted in three proposals for consultant services. After interviewing one of the applicants of Towson University, and learning of his knowledge base in organizational theory and structure and knowledge of change, it was determined that he could effectively facilitate the workgroup in addressing their charge.

A workgroup of approximately 30 people was identified, representing teachers, union executive committee, principals, assistant principals, supervisors, business partners, and representatives of senior staff. Four meetings were scheduled at a local Golf Course Center. These accommodations were made in order to create an environment and atmosphere that identified this initiative as one of importance.

The first meeting began with me, as Superintendent, presenting the charge to the group and the rationale for the discussion. The group's charge was expressed as follows:

1. Review the current organizational structure and make recommendations for improvement, which resulted in reconfiguring the existing organization structure;
2. Consider relevant issues including: site-based management and authority for strategies to improve achievement; centralized vs. decentralized services; barriers inherent in the current structure and any related issues; and
3. Determine expected outcomes: The group was to reach consensus on a recommendation which was to be presented to the Superintendent which addressed proposed improvement specific to the existing organization structure.

The question posed to the workgroup was, "How should an educational organization be structured in order to provide maximum support to teachers and students in the

improvement of academic achievement for all students?” The second question posed to the group was, “How do we have the greatest impact on increasing teacher instructional capacity?”

The work done by the group reinforced the district actions of reorganization and redeployment of current resources, including human and fiscal. The work done by the workgroup further reinforced that the district must establish and communicate a focus on teaching and achievement, and professional development that is at the school site. Their report recommended that the District create coherent and seamless K-12 experiences for teachers and students. Both system-wide and individually tailored professional development was needed. A key concept in the recommendations of the workgroup was the need to provide assistance and resource allocation at the school and classroom level, with fewer staff being allocated to central office.

As superintendent, I was able to use the discussion and recommendations of the workgroup to support the development of a plan to reorganize. Although I did not accept or act on the recommendation to move to a regional configuration as suggested by the workgroup, many of the other aspects of the recommendations made by the workgroup were used as the foundation of developing the vision, values, and beliefs on which the reorganization was built. Acting in ways that were responsive to the recommendations of the workgroup required a reallocation of resources, again both human and fiscal.

Through these District actions, the system sought to reallocate the resource needed to improve instructional capacity. In having a workgroup provide input at the ground level, the District used this group to gather data on the needs and perceptions of

the system. These data were used to develop the change initiative which became known as the *reorganization and the PLC implementation plan*.

The recommendations of the workgroup were discussed with the elementary and secondary principals' groups, and received their strong vote of support for the staffing changes. These principals viewed the potential staffing changes as providing more help to the school site. The informal discussions about having new staff at the school sites created some concerns for the District leadership. They realized that clear expectations would need to be defined about the modified roles of reassigned staff.

Board Support

The governance of the District as directed by state law indicated that the Board of Education had the legal responsibility to oversee fiscal matters of the district. They were obligated to approve an annual operating budget that was then forwarded to the County government, requesting resources needed for the operation and improvement of the District's services to students. The support of the Board was needed to advocate for use of staff resources necessary for reorganizing the staff and use with the PLC initiative. Use of staff outside the classroom was a controversial issue for elected officials who, as reported earlier, perceived the District as fiscally inefficient. On the informal side, it was imperative that the superintendent and staff have the support of the Board to moving forward with such a critical undertaking as staff reorganization.

In the context of this study's conceptual model (outlined in Figure 4.1), the dynamics that were created arose when the individuals attempted to balance their personal needs with their commitment to the District goals. These competing needs led

to the expression of opposition and concerns from those who were affected by the reassigned roles.

It was necessary to align the Annual Operating Budget with the proper request for funding in order to implement reorganization. It was important that the Board clearly understand and contribute to the decisions made. As superintendent, I provided the Board with the information that they needed to be able to explain the basis for this reorganization and allowed them to hear and know the views of others, such as the members of the workgroup and the senior staff. I argued that the recommended actions were clearly tied the initiative to the MGT study recommendations of the 2002 performance audit. I further pointed out that the expected outcomes were also related to identified needs based on the *NCLB Act*.

I felt fortunate to have one of the members of the Board involved in teaching college-level teacher education and administrative courses. His knowledge and perspective, as a retired principal, offered strong support to the reorganization concept. His credibility with the other members of the Board was strong and therefore, the time was right to address this issue and gain support for the PLC initiative and the District actions that were necessary to support it. The Board strongly supported their previously approved CPDP. The members of the Board understood the connection with the PLC movement and the need to reorganize as recommended by the MGT study and the workgroup.

The Board also needed to function as a PLC. If the superintendent and staff did not structure and organize to allow that to happen, then the trust and collaboration in decision-making would not occur and the vision would never be realized. The role of a

superintendent to teach and learn with a board can at times be ignored by the superintendent. This fact was underscored in this initiative, when at times, Board members became stressed, often because they had not been informed, were not participants in decisions, or were not able to explain why something was being done.

This component of the development of a systemic initiative stresses an action that the district must take that is not a component of the conceptual map presented in *Figure 5.2*. That action is *coalition building*. As the superintendent I built the common vision with the senior staff and with the workgroup participants. Through planned presentations and written communications to the Board (see Appendix F), the coalition is further expanded to other critical players, in this case the members of the Board of Education. While coalition building was not one of the highlighted District actions in *Figure 5.2*, it is related to the political system depicted in the conceptual model of *Figure 5.3*. The relationship between the conceptual map of District actions presented in *Figure 5.2* became clearer as the analysis of District actions revealed that certain actions were aligned with the various systems of the social systems model

Finally, grounding the action and decision needed by the Board in the MGT study placed it within a context that was familiar to, and supported by, the Board. The Board and the local newspaper expected the system to do some reorganization in response to the MGT study. As superintendent, I paired this expectation with my desire to reorganize for the PLC and capacity building initiative. Therefore, positioning the initiative in the context of familiar work and expectations allowed the District action to be more easily supported. Also helpful in garnering the support of the Board was the fact that the

reorganization was viewed positively, particularly the decreasing emphasis on central office staff, and the movement of staff to schools.

Of the ten district actions in the conceptual framework, gaining the support of the Board addressed many of the actions, such as reorganization, resource allocation, defining vision/values/beliefs, communicating visioning messages, and setting priorities and focus at the school, teacher, and achievement level. The analysis of District actions revealed that few actions were discreet in nature. Many District actions related to several action categories presented in *Figure 5.2* and related to several system issues presented in *Figure 4.1*.

Reorganization of Staffing

There was a clear message that the District needed to be reorganized into different staffing configurations. Doing so required that many people be reassigned to new positions. During the planning year of the change initiative considerable work was done on reorganizing the District to provide increased support to teachers and students at the school level. Over the course of the 2002-2003 school year, the planning and preparation year of the initiative, 46 instructionally-related staff members were reassigned from roles in the central office to newly defined roles at the school level. The two newly defined positions were those of the instructional facilitator and mentor teacher. These additional school-level positions were provided to give greater support and attention to classroom instruction and to provide additional instructional staff to support the development and operation of the PLCs. The actual position realignment began in August 2003. All staff members that were reassigned were personally told in May 2004 by District leaders.

Those assigned to the role of instructional facilitators had previously held positions generally identified as central office supervisors or assistant supervisors. The change in roles allowed them to become a part of a school staff and to be available on a daily basis to work on increasing teacher instructional capacity. In their previous roles, they had visited schools and teachers for performance observation purposes, but shared no regular daily contact or accountability for instructional improvement or student achievement. Those assigned to the role of mentor teacher typically had been in the position of teacher specialist or state or federally funded mentor positions. Under the previous organizational structure, the mentors had offices in a separate building and visited the schools as assigned. They had no ongoing relationship with the staff of any schools. Under the reorganization each middle and high school feeder system was assigned one instructional facilitator and a mentor for each school individually. At the elementary school level, where the schools were smaller, there was one instructional facilitator and one mentor for every three to four schools.

The staff members that were reassigned to these newly defined positions were selected over the course of the planning year of the initiative. A review of the District memorandum and other communication during this time revealed that the new roles created confusion, competition for level of importance and authority, and strong resistance. One instructional facilitator was assigned to a pair of feeder middle and high schools, with one mentor being assigned to each of the schools individually. At the elementary level, each instructional facilitator had three or four schools, with additional positions later reducing the load to only two schools per facilitator. Each pair of elementary schools was assigned a mentor.

New Leadership Structures

The review of District documents from this period of the PLC initiative revealed that a new structure was created to serve as a planning and implementation vehicle for the program. While the first conversations about the continuous learning concept occurred with the senior staff group, I felt that it was necessary to have a District leadership group for the PLC initiative. The group became known as the Central Instructional Leadership Team (CILT), thus later allowing the formation of a Support Service Leadership Team (SSLT) as a parallel team created for the operational side of the District. The system's Chief of Administration developed these groups. The creation of the CILT group provided a vehicle for problem identification and problem solution as the initiative developed. As superintendent, I used this forum as a place to develop the shared learning and application of knowledge that eventually led to shared vision and common vocabulary.

The creation of the CILT was an action that caused the precious resource of time to be allocated by all CILT members. This meant that the CILT had to remain committed to the importance of the PLC process as they gathered feedback and refined the District PLC initiative. One of their first and most challenging tasks was to meet with reassigned staff.

Personal Meetings with Reassigned Staff

Members of the CILT met with some of the staff on their reassignment list on May 2, 2003. During the interview they were informed of the change in their job responsibilities. They were also told of their tentative school assignments and asked if there were any serious issues with them being assigned to that school. Knowing that

there were a few vacancies would allow for any necessary changes to be made if the CILT felt the issue was valid and needed to be considered in that person's assignment. Each person was provided a job description for their new assignment. Timelines for changes were shared. This action was taken to finally make the reorganization a reality for specified staff. Personal interviews were conducted in order to be respectful of the need of each individual and allow them to meet directly with one of the members of the CILT rather than just receiving a printed list or letter about their reassignment. Only one of the reassigned staff shared a reason she could not be assigned to the selected school. A change was made to accommodate that request.

Following the formal notification of the reassigned individuals, several of them approached various members of the Board of Education to convince them that the changes should not be made because it would result in the loss of expertise at the central office level. Because I had kept the Board informed of each step of the actions and progress we were making toward these reassignments, the efforts of the reassigned staff fell on caring, yet non-responsive ears. After the day of the interviews there were some significant morale issues and off-handed comments made by some of the reassigned supervisors and assistant supervisors. Although there were rumors that some were going to seek employment in other districts, or they were going to retire, this did not happen. Seven of the teacher specialists who had been working under a supervisor in central office went back to the classroom, took different positions, or took a leave of absence rather than work in an assigned school as a mentor. Six of the mentor positions became vacant due to retirements of people in the reassigned positions. Five of these were secondary mentor positions. While this might have been considered a serious issue, as

Superintendent, I described these changes as positive in that the people who retired were able to transition to new phases of their lives, and others were given the opportunity to assume new and exciting positions for which they had specifically applied, interviewed, and been selected.

The reorganization or reassignment of staff was one that has been used in different ways by other superintendents of reform initiatives. All Suburban District staff remained in positions that were of equal status as their previous positions in central office. The morale issues that surfaced as a result of the reassignment suggested that status is in the eye of the beholder. Reporting to the principal instead of directly to an assistant superintendent was viewed as a demotion in the eyes of some staff.

Once the reassigned staff had been informed, the CILT proceeded with the next steps of defining the future vision of professional development through PLCs and the development of school-based leadership skills in increasing the instructional capacity of teachers.

As a school-based parallel to the CILT group, ILTs were created for each of the schools. The ILTs were comprised of the principal, assistant principals, instructional facilitator, mentor teacher, and reading specialist. Just as the CILT was given responsibility to work with system-wide data and identify the needs of the District, the ILTs were given responsibility for reviewing school data and working to determine and plan for the needs of their school with the school improvement team, school-based PLCs, and other groups. The CILT became entrusted with ensuring coherence for the PLC initiative and all District improvement actions.

The ILTs were defined to function as school-based leadership PLCs that learned together, identified the needs of their school and developed their skills and knowledge needed to carry out their instructional leadership efforts.

Kick Off of the Reorganization and the PLC Initiative

On June 6, 2003, the CILT conducted a full day informational session that served as the kick off of the reorganization for autumn and the beginning of the implementation of the PLC initiative. This was defined by the CILT as the end of the planning year and the beginning of the implementation year of the initiative.

This day was the first time the CILT had everyone from all educational leadership groups together since the announcement of reassignments. It was the formal kick-off of the reorganization, with the dissemination of information to leaders who would in turn have to convey it to teachers. Information regarding both the reorganization and the plan to develop the PLC structure and culture in all Suburban District schools was highlighted.

The principals and supervisors raised many logistical questions about who would perform certain tasks and processes during that session. There was confusion about roles and responsibilities. One person asked why the District would do reorganization at a time of decreasing resources. They needed time to process the information with their colleagues.

They were also concerned about their role in presenting this information to their faculties later in the month, as specified by the CILT. In order to assist school-based leadership teams in making this presentation, all were given CD-ROMs of overhead slides to be used in their presentations on the initiative to school faculty. Time was provided, during an inservice session on June 6, 2003, for school leaders to work with

their new ILT in developing a plan and shared responsibilities for sharing the information modeled for them by the CILT. An expectation was also defined that each school ILT was to administer the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (Hall & Hord, 2001) as data for the ILT to consider in understanding the perspectives of their staff about the PLC initiative.

One issue that was shared in the evaluation forms for the day was a concern about the increased prescriptive nature of the expectations that were being defined for all schools, in spite of the need that some of the administrators believed that there should be flexibility. This concern was expressed repeatedly as the reform initiative proceeded. As outlined in the literature review, tensions between centralization and decentralization typically create concerns among implementers about the contradictory messages in many reform initiatives. While the reform values and beliefs may state that site-based decision-making and accountability are valued, the increased prescriptive nature of the top-down reform actions suggested otherwise. In the Suburban School District initiative, perceptions of tensions between centralizing and decentralizing aspects were common during the implementation year of the initiative.

There was initially in this stage a need for the CILT to quickly respond to the small, operational, logistic issues that caused people concerns. In doing so they began to define the specific outcomes and tasks that each person needed to attend to, and thus the roles became operationalized through the expectations that were defined by CILT members. Many members of ILTs were excited, yet also concerned about meeting the expectations for their new roles. Even the principals, who strongly supported the reorganization and at times never believed that the CILT would actually be able to bring

the reorganization to reality, were concerned about the new expectations placed upon them, and their responsibility to create new school-based ILT structures.

The training on June 6, 2003, established that one of the purposes of the reorganization was the development of a culture of PLCs in all District schools. The PLC concept was defined, as were the five dimensions of PLCs. Interactive discussion was used to ensure that school leaders developed knowledge of each dimension of a PLC culture. The PLC culture was presented as part of creating a context of collective inquiry to determine the most effective instructional practices for involving all staff and administrators. Action research was defined as a means to that end.

This kick-off training event served to address both individual system issues of a cognitive and motivational perspective, as well as defining the role definitions that revised the division of labor in the District. In response to the confusion about roles and responsibilities, memorandums were sent to all ILT members in August 2003 to clarify roles and responsibilities of mentors and instructional facilitators.

Implementation Year - Leadership Capacity Building

Use of an External Consultant

As the CILT planned the first year of capacity-building activities for the development of PLCs they realized that the most important target group was the school-based leadership, under the new structure referred to as ILTs. The CILT determined that an external consultant, who was highly effective with the leadership staff would be used to provide the training several times during the second stage, referred to in this study as the implementation year, and that the Coordinator of Professional Development for the District would provide follow-up, reinforcement, and additional training. As the CILT

spoke with the consultants about their services that would begin in a more focused manner at the August 2003 Annual Leadership Conference, the consultants insisted that they needed to be part of the planning of the June 6, 2003, training session so that they would know what was to be shared and the methodology to be used. They also wanted to know how they would be able to build on that experience in August 2003 at the Annual Leadership Conference held by the District. Plans were developed to address the new roles and new team structures. The consultants aligned everything they presented with the concepts and texts used as a base for the CILT work on the concepts related to PLCs (Hall & Hord, 2001, DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

The external consultants presented to all ILTs and the remaining central office supervisors four times during the implementation year of the initiative. The action of planning with the external consultants was to prepare for a level of coherence in the training that would occur over the next year. They would also serve as our critical friends and advisors in providing feedback as the CILT planned. They challenged the CILT on their thinking as the CILT developed ideas for the training and communication of vision messages. This process served to solidify the CILT as a learning PLC.

Summer Training

Over the months of July and August 2003, each ILT team was provided with training intended to build knowledge of the concept, dimensions, characteristics and processes of an effective PLC. The summer training was three full days of professional development that was intended to be provided to the school-based ILTs as a group. Due to the desired vacation schedules of some of the schools' ILT members, several of the

ILTs had staff that attended different sessions with other school ILTs. The flexibility offered on this matter rendered the training less effective than it might have been.

The summer training was provided by the external consultants, who integrated PLC concept and process training with training on research-based classroom practices that would serve as the content of beginning the PLC structures and processes in their individual schools. These research-based classroom practices were equally applicable to all grades K-12 and to all content areas and disciplines. They became known as the *Best Bets*. The training addressed the individual system needs for both the ILTs as new groups and for the individual cognitive understanding and motivation of leadership personnel. The individual system needs had to be addressed uniformly at this stage, with refinement scheduled in future years.

The CILT found that many aspects of their plan were better developed as a result of feedback from an external consultant who acted as a critical friend. The long-range and individual training lesson plans modeled the standards for quality professional development. The CILT needed to model these standards if school-based leadership were to do the same. As a result, CILT presentations became more interactive and stimulating than they might have been. Each of the CILT came to understand their role to be that of a teacher to improve instructional leadership capacity with instructional personnel. Every CILT member, including myself as superintendent, acted as both teacher and staff developer as this initiative evolved.

The instructional leadership development activities went beyond the ten actions highlighted in *Figure 5.2*. While initiative development was an action specified and resource allocation was considered, the actual use of the external consultant to support

the planning and development of the initiative training was not a part of the actions in the conceptual framework. Use of external consultants has of course been used by other superintendents as a component of their reform strategies. In the case of the Hornbeck reform in the Philadelphia district, there was a requirement for an external oversight and evaluation group in order to be eligible to receive the Annenberg Foundation funds.

Annual Leadership Conference August 2003

The agenda and materials for this leadership conference were developed by the CILT. Two external consultants were used to do some of the training. One, a superintendent from a school system near Chicago, represented Rick DuFour, who was already scheduled in Maryland on the predetermined dates. The focus of his presentation as a keynote speaker was on operating as a PLC. The other external consultant was one of the “critical friend” consultants who were viewed as partners in this initiative. He was to extend and connect the comments of the visiting superintendent to the training that had been provided during the summer. This connection maintained coherence and consistency of vision and vocabulary.

Expectations for the use of PLCs were communicated via two key indicators by the superintendent. The ILTs had to meet regularly in the schools as PLCs and each school had to have at least five PLCs in operation during the implementation year of the initiative. The CILT erred once again by presenting and modeling the information that ILTs would be expected to present to their staffs during an August professional development meeting. More time was needed between observing the modeled lesson and implementing the lesson in their schools with their staffs. This caused the CILT to

explore the possibility of having the next year's leadership conference in June 2004 instead of August.

When asked what important ideas they took away from the conference, most of the comments from the participants were about PLCs and how to begin to work with them in their schools. Many of the comments shared about the value of the two day conference got to the issue of the management of the change or reform initiative. Some participants believed that the attention to the details of the change initiative would be overwhelming. The continual need for feedback to assess what the effects of actions were and how to adapt to the needs of the staff was evident. This fit under the action titled "needs assessment," but is not the kind of needs assessment discussed and described in the case studies I highlighted in the literature review. Few case study reports discussed the need to gather ongoing data for purposes of managing the change and refining the reform plan.

Several professional books were provided to every instructionally-related administrator and mentor in August 2003 at the Annual Leadership Conference. To assess readiness for the district PLC initiative, the District administered the School as a Learning Organization (SLO) Survey to all teachers in August 2003. This survey sought the perceptions of teachers on the status of their school as a learning organization and their perceptions of the existence of characteristics of the five PLC dimensions in their schools as the formal implementation of PLCs in their schools began. In this initiative the District used the SLO scores as a proxy for PLC readiness.

Table 5.1 *Suburban District Schools: Range of Teacher Perceptions of Dimensions of School as Learning Organization (June,2003)*

School Level	Participatory Leadership	Shared Vision	Collective Staff Learning	Peer Sharing	Supportive Conditions and Capacities	Total Readiness
District High Schools	5.58 - 7.84	9.65-12.17	15.24 - 18.51	4.58 – 6.33	15.10 – 17.82	51.35 – 60.65
District Middle Schools	5.86 – 7.94	10.02 – 12.95	16.83 – 20.30	4.56 – 6.10	15.61 – 20.89	53.12 – 68.37
District Elementary Schools	6.19 - 8.49	10.98 – 14.0	17.83 – 22.02	3.92 – 7.11	17.27 - 21.97	56.35 - 71.25

The highest possible score on the SLO survey instrument was 85. The range of readiness scores in the Suburban District Schools went from a low of 51.35 to a high of 71.25. The lowest scoring school was a high school. The high school mean was 57.18. The highest SLO readiness score was an elementary school. Each school also received an index score on each of the five dimensions of PLCs, which were defined in Chapter 2. The survey data provided perspective on the cultural readiness of each of the schools in the District. Added to the SLO survey were four items related to collective efficacy. These items were used by the Office of Research and Evaluation to gain insight into how collective efficacy related to PLC readiness and student achievement.

Continued Training

Over the course of the 2003-2004 school year, the external consultants provided three sessions of PLC and Best Bet training to ILT members, including the principals, instructional facilitators, and mentors. The assistant principals were not included in the training due to time constraints. This decision was one of the biggest flaws in the reform plan that received much comment at the end of the implementation year. The use of the

external consultants related to decisions made by the CILT regarding the allocation of resources and about the development of the initiative. Having an external force implement some of the training, and having them challenge the thinking of the leadership staff, was valuable in getting the leadership staff to think differently about their roles.

The Coordinator of Professional Development provided 22 Friday training sessions to the instructional facilitators and mentors. The communication of consistent and ongoing vision messages was important to the development of the common orientation and collaborative culture desired. This was evident in the transformational processes presented by Hoy and Miskel (2005) and by the work of the superintendents in the case studies reviewed. All district cases reviewed included in their district actions the implementation of a system of professional development.

The experience of the ILTs at the school level was one of contradictions. Much like the reform initiative in Philadelphia under Dr. Hornbeck, the words of school-based problem solving and professional development were the mantra, yet the feeling of the experience was one of central mandates and decisions, setting forth requirements that ILTs and PLCs were to be developed and nurtured. Therefore, the school ILTs felt ill-prepared to carry out their new responsibilities.

The issues facing the ILTs also included challenges at the high school level. Teachers, who served as coaches, were leaving school and not staying for meetings and training. Therefore, a different structure was needed to address this. Four half-days of professional development time previously allocated to district-wide professional development were re-allocated back to the schools for their use in developing and

providing meeting time for school-based PLCs. Thus, supportive structures were developed so the District defined expectations could be met.

Restructured Central Office

The Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction faced the challenge of revising the way central office supervisors approached their work. Twelve content supervisors remained, who were now required to network and provide service to schools through different means than those utilized prior to the reorganization.

Content Knowledge Building

A part of the 22 training sessions with instructional facilitators and mentors was structured to share content observation knowledge. In addition to the content knowledge training as isolated events, a joint set of actions were taken by the remaining central office supervisors and the new school-based instructional facilitators and mentors. This strategy required a content supervisor from central office to engage in joint classroom observations with the instructional facilitators and mentors to help provide job-embedded professional development on content related *look-fors*. This was a method for the diminished staffing in central office to enlarge their impact and to begin training the instructional facilitators and mentors for more meaningful engagement and feedback during their observations or coaching of teachers.

The training resulted in increases in contact time between teachers and their mentors and instructional facilitators. These experiences continued to reinforce the roles, functions, and responsibilities of the newly configured ILT members.

Lessons From the Field – “Walkthroughs”

Site visitation experiences were provided to allow the school-based ILTs to gather evidence of the progress they were making in implementing change in their schools. This training provided a structure for teachers to get into each other’s classrooms and gather agreed upon evidence to ensure that feedback and discussions occurred in their PLCs. The complete walkthrough protocol allowed teachers to gather data, talk with students, consider what they saw in comparison to a four-level rubric, and to conduct a feedback conversation with their teacher colleagues. In the initial training, the feedback was provided to the ILTs by the external consultant. The ILT from the visited school was invited to the debriefing session.

Some of the teachers, particularly at the high school level, were extremely intimidated by the walkthrough process. At one high school several teachers locked their doors so that the visiting team could not enter their rooms. The principal of this school gained insights into the level of trust and openness in his school.

The CILT required that each ILT conduct a walkthrough in their own school with a group of teachers and some ILT members. The ILTs felt overwhelmed by the requirement and the CILT ended up extending the period of time for the completion of the requirement. The feeling of being free to take risks was difficult for many ILTs who felt that they were still in working in a system where they were expected to know all the answers. This self-imposed *all knowing* expectation indicated that the shared orientations of the desired PLC culture was not yet in place.

With some practice some of the schools began to find greater comfort with the walkthroughs and they felt it was an effective strategy for gathering classroom-based

evidence of applied learning. The CILT believed that without the District requirement for the walkthroughs to occur, ILTs would not have taken the risks that walkthroughs were perceived to carry.

This *Lessons from the Field* training had a positive effect on the discussions that occurred at the ILT level after the training. The discussions were like that which should be held in a PLC. It appeared, however, that District leadership had to mandate walkthroughs if they were to be a regular part of the feedback process at the school level. A highly functioning PLC should be self-motivated and operate as an individually motivated system rather than a structured system.

This action went beyond the district actions presented in *Figure 5.2*, because those listed do not appropriately emphasize the importance of building new networks and relationships. The action or strategy was about the conveyance of information to the instructional facilitators and mentors, but even more importantly, it was about the central office supervisors having a different relationship with a broader set of instructional leadership staff in new roles. Additionally, it was also about the central office supervisors having a different relationship with the teachers in their content discipline.

Revised Observation Responsibilities

Under the previous system organization, central office supervisors and assistant supervisors engaged in observing the teachers in their content area. As previously noted, building administrators were less focused on the observation process, and thus not viewed as instructional leaders by their faculties. As a component of the “State of the System Address” in the autumn of 2003, I reported on the number of classroom observations conducted the previous year. The number was very low and did not reflect

the minimum number of observations required for the number of teachers in the system. The CILT decided that a mini-study would be conducted to see if the old District structure and number of observations could be improved by monitoring the number of observations done by each ILT member.

During the autumn of 2003 the CILT group informed the ILTs that a process was being initiated to gather data on the observations completed with teachers at each school across the district. A process of scannable observation forms was developed that included the name of the observer, the subject, as well as dates and qualitative remarks. Each of these forms were gathered on a quarterly basis from the school ILTs and the data were compiled into a report on the number of observations conducted by each ILT member, with an indication of which content areas were observed. In addition, each observation was read by the content supervisor to screen for the alignment of the lesson objectives with the Suburban District curriculum. The intent of the CILT group was to gather data and determine the best means of using it to improve teaching and learning. The District action of monitoring and oversight was also inherent in the choice to compile the data.

When the first quarter was completed and the data compiled, there were significant differences in the number of observations that were completed from school-to-school and from one ILT member within a school to another ILT member. The CILT group reviewed the data and decided to approach the ILT members to share the data. They also suggested to the ILT that they must have forgotten to send in their copies of their observations. After allowing the ILT members to be sure that all first quarter observations were submitted, the revised end of first quarter report was issued to all ILT

members. The differences in completed observations by school and position were evident to everyone. This process continued at the end of each quarter of the school year. The total number of observations increased from 2,000 for the 2002-2003 school year to 4,799 for the 2003-2004 school year.

Of those 4,799 observations, 2% were rated unsatisfactory, 2% were rated *causing concern*, and 96% were rated satisfactory. At the secondary level, the following summarized the observation data:

Table 5.2 Total Observation by ILT Positions (%)

Observations completed by the principal	31%
Observations completed by the assistant principals	18%
Observations completed by the school-based instructional facilitator	38%
Observations completed by the central office supervisor	13%

The CILT established the observational process as a leadership skill professional development focus for the 2004-2005 school year. Through this monitoring experience the CILT learned about the potential of data gathering and oversight to modify leadership behavior and better understand the practices at the school level.

Feedback for Initiative Refinement

During the implementation year of the initiative the CILT designed regular feedback opportunities for data gathering and refinement of the initiative. Some of the feedback was specifically for a presenting individual CILT member. Other data gathering structures were for more broad purposes. During the months of January and February 2004, a representative of the CILT interviewed eight focus groups of staff about

the progress they were making on the PLC development. The goals of the feedback sessions were the following:

1. To obtain perceptions and input from the District community regarding PLCs, professional development, ILTs, CILT, and central office supervisors;
2. To collect information for the District report to the Board of Education; and
3. To obtain valuable data in order to refine and guide reorganization and PLC activities at all levels.

Responses of the eight focus groups were analyzed to reflect opportunities for improvement of the PLC initiative. The patterns noted were:

1. Professional development activities that overlap tend to reduce effectiveness;
2. Teacher content professional development must occur effectively in the new model of PLCs;
3. The roles of PLCs, ILTs, content supervisors, and school improvement teams need to be better defined and clarified;
4. District leadership needs professional development on how to conduct professional development with their staff, communication skills, collaboration skills, cognitive conflict, coaching, school-level data production, and engaging the development of PLCs;
5. The CILT need to be more aware of the stress that is created during the change process;
6. Power struggles are occurring in the District;
7. The CILT must check for implementation of the innovation across schools; and

8. Faculty meetings are now used for professional development rather than administrative minutia.

These patterns became the basis of the refinements to the PLC reform initiative that would be incorporated into the District work plan for the 2004-2005 school year.

Summary Comments on District Actions

Analysis of the District actions revealed that patterns of actions were taken over the period of the first two years of the initiative. As the two initial stages of the PLC initiative unfolded, the district, under my leadership, took many actions to support the development of PLCs in schools. These actions focused on the creating the cultural dimensions of a learning organization across the district in all schools. Although it is not possible to capture all actions, conversations, or interactions related to the development of PLCs in the district schools, the methodology established in Chapter 3 as artifact review processes provided a credible way of documenting what the district was known to have done (Appendix F).

All documented actions taken by the district were compiled and designated according the model presented in Figure 5.2. Table 5.3 summarizes these data. For the purposes of this case study it was important to understand how much of each type of the District action occurred during the period of the study and each system of the social systems model. To determine this, the artifacts developed by the CILT and others were gathered, analyzed, and classified by district action, stage of the initiative, and system of the transformational model.

Table 5.3 District Action by Stage and Transformational System (%)

Planning Year				Implementation Year			
Structural System	Cultural System	Political System	Individual System	Structural System	Cultural System	Political System	Individual System
49.2%	20%	24.6%	6.1%	45.8%	12.5%	14.5%	27.0%

These data reveal that the percentage of actions taken during the planning and implementation years, that specifically addressed structural system transformational issues, were similar in extent. During the planning year, the percentage of district actions addressing cultural and political transformational issues was 40 – 48% of the attention given to structural system issues, while the percentage of district actions addressing the individual transformational issues was only 12% of the district actions addressing structural issues. Thus, the structural system actions represented a minimum of twice as much of the district activity as the other three systems during the planning year.

During the implementation year of the initiative structural system, activity was almost half of all district actions taken during this stage. Cultural and political system actions were 27 – 31% of the district actions addressing structural system issues during this period. While only 6.1% of the district actions addressed individual system transformational issues during the planning year, 27% of the district actions were individual system in nature.

These results indicated a shift in the amount of district activity within each transformational system of the conceptual framework between the planning and implementation years of the PLC initiative. Table 5.4 presents another summary of the data gathered on district actions, viewing the actions by the target audience intended as recipients of those actions.

Table 5.4 District Action by Stage and Target Audience (%)

Target Audience	Planning & Preparation District Action (% action)	Implementation Year – District Action (% action)
Superintendent	19.3%	2%
Senior Staff	9.6%	0%
CILT	20.9%	14%
Board of Education	9.6%	1%
ILTs	8.0%	14%
School Improvement Teams from Schools	1.6%	1%
Principals	6.4%	7%
Assistant Principals	0%	0%
All Administrators and Supervisors	9.6%	4%
Instructional Facilitators	1.6%	21%
Mentors	0%	24%
Department Chairs	3.2%	0%
Remaining Central Office Supervisors after Reorganization	3.2%	8%
Pupil Personnel Workers	0%	1%
Teachers	2%	2%
External Groups	2%	2%

Table 5.5 *Summary of District Action by Stage (%)*

District Action	Planning Year (%)	Implementation Year (%)
Reorganization of system, time, schools or creation of supportive structures to support PLC development	14.4%	0.7%
Resource allocation such as time, people, materials, or special forms of funding	10%	4.6%
Defining vision, values, and beliefs about the value of PLCs	8.8%	1.5%
Assessing the needs of the district and schools and promoting the use of data; initiative development	18.8%	26.5%
Defining and communicating expectations for the schools and staff	8.8%	12.5%
Defining priorities and maintaining focus on the PLC initiative	5.5%	3.1%
Providing Training	13.3%	25%
Monitoring and Oversight	0%	7.0%
Communication of vision messages to school administrators and staff	7.7%	7.0%
Defining roles and responsibilities for the ILT members and the school staff	12.2%	11.7%

These data revealed that the highest percentage of District action in both the planning and implementation years was in the area of assessing the needs of the District and its schools and using that data to develop the actions and strategies of the initiative, followed by training as the second most frequent district action during these periods. The least frequently taken action during the year of planning was monitoring and oversight of

the progress of the schools. Reorganization was the least frequently taken District action during the year of implementation. A large percentage of difference in District action categories between the two years was noted in three areas: (a) reorganization or restructuring, which was taken 14.4% in the planning year and only 0.7% in the following year; (b) defining vision, values, and beliefs, which was 8.8% of actions taken in the initial year and only 1.5% of actions taken in the implementation year, and (c) monitoring and oversight of the progress of the schools, which was 0% of the district actions in the planning year and 7.0% of the actions in the following year. Three District action categories were relatively balanced in use during both years of the study. These included: (a) defining priorities and maintaining focus; (b) communication of vision messages to school administration and staff, and (c) defining roles and responsibilities for the ILT members and staff.

Structured Interviews with ILTs

At the conclusion of the implementation year, the CILT decided to conduct structured interviews with ten of the school-based ILTs. These interview data were intended to provide deeper understanding of the impact of the District actions on the work at the school level. The interview data also served as a basis for understanding the perspective of the key school leadership to the decisions and choices made by the District leadership group, the CILT. Quoted comments from these interviews will be presented in Chapter 6 as data analyzed within the scope of the retrospective case study.

Chapter 6: School-Based ILT Reaction to District Actions

Overview

As a result of the *No Child Left Behind Act* schools and districts across the country are working to identify effective strategies for the improvement of student achievement. Meeting the federal achievement guidelines has become the standard by which schools and districts are judged. The growing number of schools and districts on the *needs improvement list* serves to increase the sense of urgency about identifying effective or promising practices. This study examined the role of the district in taking actions that support the development of professional learning communities in all school across the District. The Suburban School District developed a systemic improvement initiative that focused on the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) across all schools in the district.

In Chapter 5 the actions taken by the district were described and analyzed in order to answer the research question about the actions taken by the District in its efforts to support the development of PLCs. The analysis described the intensity of the District's efforts in each of the four systems of the social system model used to guide this study. The purpose of this chapter is to describe how the leadership at the school level made sense of these district actions and how they perceived them as either supports or barriers to change.

As a means of reflecting on the work on PLCs, the Central Instructional Leadership Team (CILT) gathered data from a sample of ten of the District's 50 schools for the purpose of program revision and planning. Data were gathered on the perceptions

of ILT members of the helpfulness and extensiveness of District actions through the use of individual survey items. The Individual ILT Progress Surveys (IPS) survey items (Appendix C) were sent to each Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) member in the ten sample schools. These ILT members were asked about their perceptions of the extensiveness and helpfulness of the possible district actions (Figure 5.2). ILT members were also asked about how much progress they perceived their school as making on the implementation of PLC conditions. Subsequently all ILT members participated in structured interview sessions with other members of their school teams. In this study, my secondary analysis of these data revealed the perspectives of individual ILT members as they reflected on the actions taken by the District. To better understand the individual perspectives of the ILT members about District actions, the analyses of the data were further explored by seeking comments made by ILT members during the structured interviews on similar topics. These comments were examined to provide deeper understanding of the perception of District actions.

Perceptions of District Actions

The data reported thus far captured the quantitative comparisons of extensiveness of use as documented in the analysis of district artifacts. As the first year of implementation began, the members of the CILT decided to assess the extent to which the ILTs perceived that the district had taken each action and whether or not these actions were helpful in their school-based efforts to develop PLC culture. Perceptions were obtained from members of the ILTs in ten schools in late June and early July 2004. The CILT decided that they, too, should individually complete the extensiveness and helpfulness items as comparisons to the perceptions of the ILTs. The CILT members

made an assumption that their ratings would align with those of the ILTs in extensiveness of action use; however, it was also assumed that there would be differences in the perceptions of the CILT and ILT members about the helpfulness of each District action.

The primary analysis of the survey data gathered and examined by the CILT considered the frequency of ILT member responses on the use and helpfulness of each District action. This process resulted in a mixed collection of perceptions about District actions and their use and helpfulness. The secondary analysis, done for purposes of this study, took the data through additional analysis. The secondary analysis examined the data by comparing the ratings of the CILT with those of the ILT reported perceptions. The secondary review also explored the meaning of the individual survey data by analyzing the responses according to a defined range of responses that aligned with established categories of extent of use and helpfulness. Table 6.1 summarized these data.

Table 6.1

Summary Data of Survey Perceptions of District Actions: Extensiveness of Use and Helpfulness

District Action	Perception of Extensiveness of Use by %*						Perception of Helpfulness by %*					
	CILT			ILTs			CILT			ILTs		
	% low use	% moderate use	% high use	% low use	% moderate use	% high use	% helpful	% moderately helpful	% not helpful	% helpful	% moderately helpful	% not helpful
Reorganization or restructuring	0%	0%	100%	20%	20%	60%	75%	25%	0%	30%	50%	10%
Resource allocation	0%	0%	100%	80%	10%	10%	25%	50%	25%	0%	60%	30%
Defining vision, values, beliefs	0%	50%	50%	10%	30%	60%	25%	25%	50%	60%	40%	0%
Assessing needs, data use, initiative Development	75%	0%	25%	10%	30%	60%	100%	0%	0%	20%	70%	0%
Defining and communicating expectations	50%	0%	50%	0%	50%	50%	0%	100%	0%	10%	90%	0%
Defining priorities & maintaining focus	50%	0%	50%	10%	30%	60%	25%	75%	0%	20%	60%	0%
Training/professional development	25%	0%	75%	10%	50%	40%	25%	75%	0%	30%	60%	10%
Monitoring and oversight	100%	0%	0%	60%	20%	20%	0%	50%	50%	0%	20%	50%
Communicating vision messages to schools and staff	100%	0%	0%	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%	100%	10%	80%	10%
Defining roles and responsibilities	10%	0%	75%	40%	30%	30%	25%	0%	75%	20%	50%	20%

* When percentages do not total 100% by group, excessive disagreement occurred on an ILT team preventing one rating.

There was disagreement between CILT and ILT members on the extensiveness of action use by the District (Table 6.1). The CILT members rated many district actions as taken either extensively or not extensively, with few actions rated in the mid-range of *moderate extensiveness*. While the CILT had 100% agreement on the perceived extensiveness of four district actions, there was not 100% agreement on perceived extensiveness of use of any of the district actions across all school ILT teams (Table 6.1).

Two of the actions perceived exactly the same by 100% of the CILTs were reorganization and resource allocation. These two actions were foundational actions for the PLC initiative. The commitment obtained by the school-based administrators for the PLC initiative and the strong message of concentration on instruction was due to receiving additional administrative staff and receiving the help of the mentor. Providing these human resources was a huge allocation of resources to the schools. These facts result in these actions standing out in the minds of the CILT members. All CILT members were personally impacted by the reorganization and reallocation of human resources. The Coordinator of Professional Development was a reassigned staff member from the central office changes. The reallocation of human resources was personal. Another CILT member lost half of his central staff, suffering new challenges in developing curriculum and providing content expertise to the schools with fewer staff. Finally, the two remaining CILT members supervised school-based administrators. Knowing the impact the reorganization had on 46 different individuals, these particular CILT members were committed to ensuring that intense attention was given to classroom practice.

All CILT members rated two actions as *low use*, monitoring and oversight and communicating vision messages. The CILT members were more likely to see the District action use as one extreme or the other, while the school-based Instructional Leadership Teams saw more actions as *moderate use*.

The data revealed that there was also a difference between the perceptions of the CILT and the school ILTs on the helpfulness of district actions. As a group, the CILT had the highest level of agreement on their perception of the helpfulness of *assessing needs /data* use as a district action. They viewed it as 100% helpful. Another district action, *communicating vision messages to schools and staff*, was perceived by 100% of the CILT as not helpful. If a rating of helpful was combined with a rating of moderately helpful for an overall rating of generally helpful, then six of the ten actions would receive a positive helpfulness rating from the CILT. On those same six actions the ILTs would agree with that five of the six actions were generally helpful, including actions of reorganization, data use and assessing needs, defining and communicating expectations, defining priorities and maintaining focus, and training or professional development.

The district action on which the ratings of the CILT and ILTs differ was resource allocation. As indicated earlier, the values of this District suggest that schools tend to have an *add on thinking* about resources needed to solve challenges. While the CILT realized that providing two new building-base staff to provide instructional focus and support was a tremendous commitment of resources, the ILTs do not readily view the reorganization as additional resources. The ILTs would agree that these are new or additional resources if a conversation points this out, but they do

not think of it in that manner on their own. School-based administrators tend to think first of additional resources as being extra money. This would be an interesting area for research exploration.

Another interesting pattern revealed in the compiled action data is that while 100% of the ILTs perceived the District action of defining vision, values, and beliefs as generally helpful, only half of the CILT viewed that action as helpful. This was surprising given that the training modules on PLC, the printed materials and books provided to the schools, and the comments of the superintendent often reinforced that the part of the work of school-based administrators was to communicate and reinforce the vision and values of PLCs to their staff. One would wonder about why this action was not viewed as helpful if it was an action that was in many ways communicated by the CILT as a requirement of ILTs.

Two other district actions received high helpfulness ratings from the ILTs but not the CILTs. These District actions included *communicating vision messages to the schools and staff* and *defining roles and responsibilities*. While one might suggest that the schools felt that the more the vision messages came, the more helpful it was, the CILT may have rated this action low on the helpfulness scale because the action had no personal aspect of being helpful to them. When considering the District action of *defining roles and responsibilities* and asking why the CILT would not see this as helpful, it would appear that the rating was influenced by the fact that the CILT was often hearing about the confusion staff felt with their new roles. These ratings were gathered at the end of the first year of implementation. The CILT surely realized that

understanding roles was an issue that would require ongoing attention in the future, thus influencing the rating of the action's helpfulness.

Neither the CILT nor the ILT saw the action of monitoring and oversight as being helpful. Half of the CILT rated it as moderately helpful, while only 20% of the ILTs saw monitoring and oversight as being to any degree helpful. The data in Table 5.5 shows that 0% of the total actions taken by the district during the planning year of the initiative were monitoring and oversight and only 7% of the total district actions were monitoring and oversight during the first year of implementation. This low level of activity in this area would explain and confirm the perceptions of both CILT and ILTs on this action.

To better understand the perspectives of the ILTs about the extent of use and helpfulness of the actions taken by the District, a review of each action was conducted. The comparative data followed by comments from the ILT about each action is outlined in the next sections of this chapter. In these sections the ratings of the CILT will be compared to the ratings of the ILT, followed by structured interview comments that may be helpful in understanding what the views of schools were about the District action being discussed.

Perceptions of District Reorganization and Restructuring Actions

When comparing perceptions on District actions of reorganization and restructuring, the data revealed that 100% of the CILT thought that reorganization and restructuring actions were used to a high degree. Only 60% of the ILTs had the perception that actions related to reorganization and restructuring were used to a high degree. When expressing perceptions of the helpfulness of this type of District

action, 75% of the CILT viewed reorganization or restructuring actions as helpful, with the other 25% viewing these actions as moderately helpful. Thirty per cent of the ILTs viewed the District's actions related to reorganization or restructuring as helpful, and 50% viewed these actions as moderately helpful.

If perceptions of *helpful* and *moderately helpful* are combined, viewing the combined rating as a positive rating for the District action, then 100% of the CILT and 80% of the ILTs perceived the actions of *reorganization and restructuring* as *helpful*. This was largely because of the human resources that were brought to bear on instructional improvement in schools.

A review of the discussions during the structured interviews found comments that offer some perspective. A member of the ILT at Hoyle Middle (HMS) observed that placing instructional facilitators and mentors in schools provided an impetus to administrative teams to focus more directly on instruction. "I think it [PLCs] would have been a little harder if we hadn't done a reorganization... bringing in team leaders just to focus on instruction ...and expected" [ILTs to focus on instruction]. (HMS, June, 2004)

Another ILT member from HMS continued to further explain the impact of the reassigned staff into the positions of instructional facilitator and mentor:

Yes, but we met faithfully and that was important knowing looking forward to the next thing. We requested a whole lot more [from teachers] than we've ever been able to do in the past because we had someone. I mean we created an agenda and followed it and did a pretty good job with that I think. So it wasn't that the intention wasn't there and that will wasn't there before, but having those extra couple of people to help do the work made a difference. (HMS, June, 2004)

However, as indicated in the data displayed in Table 6.1, some members (10%) of school-based ILTs perceived the reorganization actions of the District as not helpful. An ILT member from Community High School (CHS) perceived the new instructional facilitator position (IF) as not helpful. The assistant principal, for example, was initially under the impression that the IF would take over responsibilities of observation and evaluation, and stated, “I felt like, ‘well, you’re cutting me out of the instructional loop here and now you’re making me more of a manager, because I was under the impression that the IF was going to take some of that [administrative burden] away” (CHS, July, 2004). Instead, this assistant principal pointed out that work actually increased, and “nothing was taken off the plate, if anything, because we did things in teams of two [observations], we actually seemed to have more” (July, 2004).

These comments by the assistant principal were revealing and, to some degree, echoed across the system. The assistant principals continued in their duties of discipline and management of students. The expectations of role functions defined by the CILT for the mentor and IF indicated that they were not to engage in anything that distracted from their emphasis on instructional improvements when teachers were in classrooms. A new emphasis was communicated to building principals that they must work with other experienced members of their ILT to be sure that the AP’s received coaching in observation skills. Thus, when the comment says they were working as a pair of two, the message is that there was positive follow up on the expectation that AP’s be coached.

The creation of Instructional Leadership Teams caused some concern over the changing roles and responsibilities in the schools. Members of ILTs reported that this was particularly true for the assistant principals. Although an ILT member from American Middle School (AMS) was more positive about the new instructional focus for the work than principals, assistant principals, teacher mentors and instructional facilitators were in creating school-based PLCs, that ILT member shared concerns about apparent redistribution of job responsibilities, and the changes in the work of the assistant principal:

...in this restructuring [and] the development of these ILT teams with a mentor teacher and the IF and the administrators and the shifting of responsibilities placing the greater emphasis on instruction, which involves more observation of teachers and evaluations of teachers by the AP's in particular, I wonder how much thought went into the redistribution of job responsibilities. It seems and this is not a personal slant to the principal, but it seems like responsibilities were taken off the principal's plate and added to the assistant principal's plate without any sense of balance there. (AMS, June, 2004)

It was apparent that the confusion over the roles and responsibilities evident in these comments, pointed to a failure in the District dissemination plan. Assistant principals had been inadvertently left out of District training activities. Thus, they were always the ones carrying the daily building operation and management load while others were going to training and they never had a balance of leaving for periodic days of training.

Their dismay was evident in the comments by an assistant principal, who wrote, "if I had been there [at briefing sessions] I would have had a better understanding" (CHS, July, 2004). The concern over lack of involvement of the assistant principals in the initial District briefing did lead the District to revise its

training calendar to include the assistant principals in the subsequent year. Notably, an ILT member of CHS observed:

I believe that with the reorganization of the calendar and the way they're going to operate next year, it may begin to soften some of the mind sets that various assistant principals have because there will be opportunities for them to be with principals and also with the IFs and the mentors, and they can possibly get a different feel and respect. (CHS, June 2004)

Despite these concerns, members of the ILTs were generally positive about the reorganization actions taken by the District, particularly the focus on instruction. As one member observed, "but again, [there are] a lot of good things to be said about placing more emphasis on instruction and involving the AP's as instructional leaders. I think that's on the plus side" (AMS, June, 2004). This individual also acknowledged that "the whole restructuring is mandating a greater emphasis on instruction, which is [critically important for meeting goals] our careers, our professions, [and] to education" (AMS, June, 2004).

Perceptions of District Resource Allocation

Strong disagreements between CILT and ILTs were revealed in the data gathered by the individual surveys of their perceptions of the resource allocation actions taken by the District. While 100% of the CILT perceived that the District engaged significantly in allocating resources, 80% of the ILTs perceived that resource allocation was a low use action. Seventy-five per cent of the CILT perceived the resource allocation that occurred as District actions as being helpful or moderately helpful. Although 80% of the ILTs perceived resource allocation actions as low use, 60% of the ILTs rated resource allocation as helpful. The differences in perceptions

of the extent to which the District allocated resources to support the creation of school-based professional learning communities are examined next.

Differences in perceptions about the helpfulness of the District's resource allocations were further revealed in the comments from the group structured interviews with school team members. An ILT member from River Walk Middle School (RWMS) was pleased with the allocation of additional staff, but also perceived the difficulty in trying to share these staff members with another school:

I can deal with sharing the facilitator at this point of our evolution, hopefully that will eventually become a full-time position in every secondary school, but sharing a mentor, and I think my high school colleague would say the same thing, that's gotten in our way significantly this year and again that's no reflection on our mentor who is wonderful. (RWMS, July, 2004)

An ILT member from a high school shared the perception that the expectations were not clear and the allocation of the resource of the instructional facilitator was less than helpful:

In spite of the fact that we have an instructional facilitator, when we divided up responsibilities for observation and evaluation and we tried to be very cognizant of the fact that the IF was in another building two days a week and in training one day a week, there was not a reduction for the administrative staff in terms of the work that was needed to be done. Now, having experienced this for a year and looking at some modifications to the schedule next year we begin to address them with Friday training sessions, we think that that situation may improve, but that was an example of where there was a resource allocation that didn't have what I think was one of the intended effects. (LHS, June, 2004)

As with all decisions, there are opportunity costs to the allocation of resources, particularly those associated with moving instructional resources from central office to schools. One ILT member from the Military Drive Elementary School (MDES) highlighted this opportunity cost by stating:

I think, in some cases, the human resource allocation has been beneficial, and in other cases [not so helpful especially] where people were moved from spots where they really were very necessary and they were moved away from those positions, I think that's hurt us this year because there's been a lot of scrambling to get some things in place that some teachers have needed. (MDES, June, 2004)

This individual was especially concerned that central office supervisors in certain academic areas had lost the instructional support that they needed to address accountability and assessment changes by the state. At the same time, the individual recognized that the reassignment of instructional personnel to schools might in the future have a positive effect by stating, "Maybe down the road I'm going to say, oh this was really a great thing to do when everything is evened out, but right now, being in the position I'm in, I saw that as a detriment this year" (MDES, June, 2004).

As discussed previously, the issue of resource allocation to school-based administrators often means that they get additional funding. While the District provided people and textbooks from the central account, the fact that there was not a budget line in their budgets that provided money about which they had decision power resulted in a low rating for resource allocation.

Perceptions of District Actions in Defining Vision, Values, and Beliefs

The District's vision and its underlying values and beliefs supporting the initiative to create school-based professional learning communities were not initially clear to the members of the school-based ILTs. They perceived the changes to be incrementally designed. One ILT member complained, "I think one of the big problems was that we didn't have the big picture. I needed the big picture last August, not as we went along" (HMS, June, 2004). This individual complained that it

was hard to lead a school improvement team when directions were provided by the CILT over the course of the implementation year. Similar to other ILT members, this individual expressed optimism that the next year would be easier by stating, “I look forward to next year because I think there’s a better plan” (HMS, June, 2004).

Other ILT members commented on their lack of clarity about the values and beliefs that guided the District’s development of the PLC initiative. An ILT member from CHS explained initially, “I couldn’t see where it (the District’s PLC initiative) was all coming from why and what’s going on” (CHS, June, 2004). Another member initially wondered, “Where is this coming from - is this something just from... [the external consultant] or is this something from the State? That wasn’t very clear to me and so I thought, “Well, how is this different from committees that we’re working on?” (CHS, June, 2004).

The apparent lack of clarity about the initiative’s purpose and its relationship to previous and existing initiatives was problematic for this individual, who said that if the ILT had possessed such information, “I probably would have been able to answer a lot more people’s questions you know - why are we doing this” (CHS, June, 2004). At the same time, this ILT member indicated that later in the year, in May, when the District sent school ILT reports on their mean scores on each of the five dimensions of PLC readiness, along with district means, the relevance of the initiative for high schools became clearer when it was stated, “Now I understand where we’ve coming from and why they selected certain things and what we do ties in with what the high school does” (CHS, June, 2004).

In addition, knowledge about the nature of the PLC initiative grew as ILT members worked together, and as they had opportunities to visit other schools at other levels to observe PLC activities. The CHS member of the ILT commented that visiting an elementary school made the collaborative processes needed in high schools clearer by commenting, “we’re working a little more on the community and doing in-service with the high schools” (CHS, June, 2004). Another member agreed that after the first year of implementation, the direction needed for a school’s efforts to result in the creation of a PLC would be somewhat clearer. It was stated, “This year I feel a little better because I have had that whole year of a framework together” (CHS, June, 2004).

The perspectives of the provided by the school ILT member comments help with an understanding that progress takes time. The comments revealed that ILT members were hopeful for the future. While they believed that the CILT was learning to do a better job of providing support and meeting the needs of the ILTs, and maybe that is true, but we also know that change is unsettling for people who are implementers. The comments suggest that the implementers were gaining understanding and feeling decreased levels of concern. Repeating the ratings of the Stages of Concern Survey may be a revealing process in the future.

Perceptions of Training Actions Taken by the District

The training provided to ILT members, with the exception of assistant principals, was perceived as variably helpful by ILT members. Their comments were at times different than the ratings on the ISP responses, which indicated that training was viewed as generally helpful by 80% of the ILTs. Some perceived District

training to not be appropriately targeted on the IF needs for deeper understanding of content and to focus on grade level needs. Some complained that in some sessions too much content was covered. Other sessions focused on material that ILT members felt they had already covered. One ILT member from Community Elementary School (CES) complained:

I would have to also agree as an IF, I was extremely frustrated by our staff development sessions. ...in the spring, in April and May when we were meeting like every week [while] we had so many evaluations and observations to get done as well, [the training meeting] really impacted our time when we really felt very frustrated by the need to be at something that we already had or knew or [that] didn't really have a lot of, unfortunately, meaning for us. And so that was frustrating. (CES, July, 2004)

In addition, as previously noted, the failure to include assistant principals was perceived to be problematic by many ILT members. As one stated, "I'm glad to see that next year, I know they've involved AP's in some of those meetings because I know that it just seemed that they were definitely out of the loop a lot of times this year with some of the information we would get or some of the things that we would do" (AMS, June, 2004).

For other members of ILTs, the District professional development provided members with useful information to support their work in fostering school based PLCs. One ILT member from American Middle School (AMS) observed, "I think myself and ... were very fortunate to have all the Friday training sessions that we had this year, because a lot of what we were learning then we could bring back and share with our ILTs or implement within the classrooms or share with the faculty" (AMS, June, 2004). In particular, the ILTs learned from the District's professional development program to restructure the focus of their school staff development days

to reflect a similar focus on instructional issues. An ILT member observed, “our faculty meetings address more staff development issues rather than just being kind of nuts and bolts sessions and we took a lot of feedback from the teachers” (AMS, June, 2004).

The District’s professional development, which focused on developing the team and instructional leadership capacities of the ILT, was viewed as helpful. Members of the ILT learned to discuss issues of concern to teachers, and to plan school staff development to meet those concerns. The ILT meetings provided a venue for members to share insights into changes needed, and to engage in problem solving on specific issues facing individuals in their work facilitating instructional improvement. One ILT member from AMS observed, “I would bring feedback [from teachers] to this group and we’d sit down and plan our next staff development session based on what the teachers were saying and what they wanted” (AMS, June, 2004).

An important outcome was that instructional and organizational approaches were diffused more widely across the District and infused more deeply into classrooms. Within the school, the ILT focused on articulating the school’s vision for a professional learning community, and then, individual members of the ILT articulated that vision to teachers. Members of the ILTs acted as conduits for concerns and information responding to those concerns. An ILT member explained, “I really felt like part of this small group here [the school ILT, and I also felt I was] a liaison between those two groups [the district CILT and ILTs]” (AMS, June, 2004).

ILT comments emphasizes that listening to the school-based ILT members was valuable to the CILT. In cases where the CILT was responsive to the expressed

concern, the ILT comments were hopeful and positive. In cases where the ILT members felt they expressed a view that did not receive a response or adaptation for meeting their needs, the frustration built. The District was right to build in frequent feedback loops between the CILT and the ILTs, but the need to respond in some way, even if it is just to acknowledge a future need to adapt, was a strong message.

Perceptions of District Actions Assess Needs/Data Use/ and Initiative Development

The actions taken by the District leadership, the CILT, to gather data through various forms of needs assessment and then apply that data to decision-making were also perceived in different ways by CILT and ILTs. Some of the decision-making led to changes in the way the PLC initiative was implemented or refined, while other data were gathered and used by the CILT to determine resource allocation such as time or attention of the CILT members through school visitations.

The data gathered during the individual surveys revealed that the CILT perceived few efforts had been made to involve the District in needs assessments or other forms of evaluation and monitoring. Despite this, 100% of the CILT members perceived needs assessments and the data use for decision-making about District actions and the development of the initiative as being helpful.

In contrast, 60% of school-based ILTs perceived the district to be active in assessing needs and using data for decision-making. Of the school-based ILTs, 70% of them perceived this District action as being moderately helpful, and another 20% viewed it as helpful. Thus, assessing needs and using data to make decisions was perceived as a supportive action by the District for developing PLCs.

Some ILT members described their efforts to convey their professional development needs to CILT members as important in focusing attention of important challenges in creating PLCs. One ILT participant stated that, “many requests were made to have sessions with more meaningful presentations for us, and I think it was through our efforts that we did get some content [included in the presentations]” (CES, July, 2004). The member further observed, “[I] could understand and really tried to support and help the presenter, but there was a real disconnect in their understanding of what we needed” (CES, July, 2004).

One area of weakness that was repeatedly mentioned in the structured interviews was the fact that the assistant principals were left out of the schedule for receiving the training provided to the principals, instructional facilitators, and mentors first hand. This revealed that the plan held by the CILT that the trainees would in turn train the assistant principals was not an effective plan. However, the ILTs also acknowledged that the CILT did analyze the information about ILT and school needs they received through the focus groups that were conducted as part of a needs analysis, and corrected problems identified by redefining the training plans. For example, a secondary level ILT member noted, “Oh yes, the schedule includes assistant principals, so that’s been changed and that probably came out of the focus groups. I know it came up at the assistant principal’s focus groups” (CHS, June, 2004).

In planning district actions, members of the CILT took into account the feedback they received from focus groups that they had conducted to determine the needs of ILTs. The CILT’s use of feedback was perceived to be a positive indicator

of District responsiveness to the needs of ILTs and schools as they developed into professional learning communities. A ILT member from a high school observed, “it was very important because, from that feedback we could tell that they were moving forward with their vision, with their initiatives and they were making changes to some of the things they had done which showed that they are listening, it showed that they want to keep moving forward and they want it to get better” (CHS, June, 2004).

Data such as these reinforce the need for the District to continue the active inquiry process of acting and then gathering data to assess the impact of their actions. Through transparent discussions of how data are gathered and used, the CILTs modeled for schools the action research cycle. Continued work in this area would help to move the ILTs in that direction. District responses to the feedback of school ILTs are noted and are appreciated and seem to serve as motivation for continued commitment on the part of school-based leadership.

Perceptions of District Action in Defining and Communicating Expectations

Defining and communicating expectations was considered an action that the CILT needed to take to provide some consistency in the effort put forth by the school ILTs in developing PLCs in their schools. The ILT members frequently asked about the types of activities they should be doing in their schools. Half of the CILT members believed the District had been active in defining and communicating expectations, the other half viewed this as a low priority. Ninety per cent of the ILTs perceived the District as being moderately to highly active in defining and communicating expectations about the creation of school-based PLCs. The perceptions of both the CILT members and ILTs were more aligned when

commenting on the helpfulness of defining and communicating expectations.

Seventy-five per cent of the CILT perceived defining and communicating expectations as a helpful District action, and another 25% saw the action as moderately helpful. Similarly, 60% of ILTs perceived defining and communicating expectations as a moderately helpful District action, and another 20% perceived it as helpful. Twenty per cent of the ILTs differed significantly in perceptions of the helpfulness the District's efforts to define and communicate expectations.

A review of the comments made during the structured interviews about the efforts of the CILT to define and communicate expectations revealed that at times the school-based ILTs wanted more or clearer expectations given by the CILT. One of the ILT members revealed their frustration about implementation of PLCs:

... as we look at this you can't argue with any philosophy that's set forth. When you read *Breaking Rank* [s II], when you read the literature on professional learning communities, it all makes sense, it's logical, you know it's the way to go, but the devil's in the details and the details have been problematic for us in almost all areas. It's the implementation that's gone awry. (AMS, June, 2004)

Comments by a member from a high school ILT revealed a need for the CILT to provide direction and set expectations concerning the development of PLCs:

I'll go back to the example I shared earlier. There was a lack of direction in terms of what the expectations were ... [about creating] PLC's. We took the information we had and we put together what I believe was very credible staff development experiences for our teachers so that we could begin to take what we were getting from the central office and translate it in a way that was meaningful and useful and valuable to our teachers, but we never knew for sure whether we were conflicting or duplicating what someone else had done or if we were even on the track that we were expected to be on and I would suggest to you that we're still not sure about that. (LHS, June, 2004)

This same ILT member further commented on the lack of clear expectations. Some ILT participants had a belief that the CILT should have defined expectations in all

areas, even those that the CILT left open to school decision-making. One comment included:

... let me say that when we sat down as a group to plan that staff development, it wasn't as if we were planning it and having a real clear understanding of what our marching orders were. There was this universal material out there that we had to pick and choose from to decide what made sense for us. (LHS, June, 2004)

Other ILTs were concerned about the variation among schools in approaches taken by

ILTs. A member of a middle school ILT observed:

From a district perspective, it seems to me, that there needs to be a little bit more exact definition of the instructional leadership teams and then the expectations of what should be going on in the building. There are lots of variations on what an Instructional Leadership Team is across the County. I think that's a problem. (RWMS, July, 2004)

A different ILT member explained, "the lack of definition and the diversity, [in implementation] in this case, is not a good thing" (RWMS, July, 2004). Another member stated that:

When I talk to a colleague, he or she is operating completely differently in the ILT than I am, you know, there are ILT's that meet once every blue moon, there are ILT's that are like us meeting every week, there are ILT's that, you know, they encourage their meetings with no agenda, no purpose, well we need to get together, so that aspect I think of the district is missing an opportunity. I think it's okay for the district to say, we need to be sensitive to local needs and Suburban District Schools will have an Instructional Leadership Team that looks like this and every school will meet weekly and that's it. (RWMS, July, 2004)

Members further commented about the need for the CILT to be precise about expectations and to hold people accountable to adhere to them:

I don't know that this is true, but it looks like and I hope it's not true, but it looks like the leadership is somewhat, not intimidated, but this is apprehensive about being too prescriptive. I think it is the time, and there is a time and a place to be prescriptive, and I think this is the time and the place to be prescriptive...[Suburban School District] needs to say, every school has an

ILT that looks like this and this is how they work. This is who's on it. (RWMS, July, 2004)

Although finding the diversity in implementation to be problematic, this ILT member also recalled that the District had indeed focused considerable attention in training during the spring and summer prior to implementation on defining the roles and expectations of ILTs. This ILT member noted surprise in recalling that during the spring and summer training expectations had been set for the ILTs, "I mean, I still have a copy of the PowerPoint where [the Superintendent] said in her presentation, the ILT will look like this" (RWMS, July, 2004).

Moreover, the ILT participant from the same school acknowledged that the expectations that a reading specialist be included in the ILT provided a long sought opportunity to make changes in the school leadership team by stating:

Well, that gave me justification to do something I had wanted to do for a number of years, hire a reading specialist. Not only did I justify it because of the needs we have in our enrollment for that kind of specialized reading attention, but I also had the backing of the superintendent expecting a reading specialist to be on this school ILT" (RWMS, July, 2004).

This ILT member recognized that other schools had not been so opportunistic by reporting that, "Well, when I started going to meetings, I'm the only school with a reading specialist and I go, 'don't you have one?' and they're scratching their heads, 'what do you mean reading specialist?' I mean, I've got the copy, I mean, I was there she told everybody." (RWMS, July, 2004)

The diverse comments suggest that despite the consistently high rating (100%) that District actions that define and communicate expectations are helpful; the ILTs felt that more of this was needed. The individual school ILTs responded in ways that reinforce the social systems model issues of the Individual System. ILTs appear to be

interested in a form of *fairness and equity* in the things that occur in the schools across the District. Although the staff members who work in the central offices typically perceive that schools want greater autonomy, there may be a shift in that desire in this era of accountability. This is an area that should be the focus of a conversation between the CILT and the ILT members. More direct observation and monitoring of the ILTs and school application of expectations are desired. When the superintendent says something should be done, the ILTs believe actions should occur to assure it was done.

Perceptions of District Actions in Defining Priorities and Maintaining Focus

The summary of analysis of District Action presented in Table 5.5 revealed that only 5.5% of District actions during the planning stage of the initiative were related to defining and maintaining priorities. During the implementation year only 3.1% of District actions addressed priority setting. On the individual surveys 50% of the CILT members perceived the District to have been relatively inactive in defining and maintaining priorities, while the other 50% of CILT perceived the District to have been very active in defining and maintaining priorities. Ninety per cent of the ILTs perceived the District to have been moderately to highly engaged in defining priorities and maintaining focus on creating PLCs.

However, almost all of the CILT and the ILTs perceived District actions taken in defining priorities and maintaining focus as helpful. One hundred per cent of the CILT members rated this action as either moderately helpful or helpful and 80% of the ILTs rated the action as moderately helpful or helpful. These data reveal that the District's efforts to define specific priorities for the schools and to help them maintain

their focus by not engaging in actions that caused competing demands of them was viewed helpful by ILTs.

An ILT member from a middle school shared this perception about the District actions providing focus:

Just to put the knowledge base in my head as far as where to go for direction impacted what occurred at this school this year. They gave us direction, we were wondering what it is we're supposed to be sharing with teachers, not saying that everything was totally clear, it established what that focus would be and with vocabulary knowing the focus and also with the vision, mission and goals defining what that is and saying you should be focusing on your own vision, mission and goals. (HMS, June, 2004)

Another ILT member from HMS explained that the members of the ILT were able to articulate their focus and come to decisions more easily than the school improvement teams had done in the past. Those teams had been comprised of ten to 15 individuals, who met often without a clear focus, "A lot of times [in the school improvement team] you could spin your wheels because sometimes people didn't always know what the focus was" (HMS, June, 2004). Another member of this ILT, when elaborating on the difference between the old school improvement team and the ILT, stated:

It's not that the school improvement team didn't focus on instruction. That happened before, but it was more the implementation. [In a school improvement team] you implement your wallop to about the first snow and then you have to deal with the regular things that happen in school and those kind of get on the back burner. It's hard to stay [on focus], it's hard to keep correcting it's hard to keep the motivation because of too many other things we have to do come in place. (HMS, June, 2004)

In contrast, the new ILT was viewed by members at HMS as providing a clearer focus on instruction, one that made decision-making easier and quicker. ILT members believed that their training provided a common vocabulary that facilitated

speedy decision-making, and ensured that decisions were made coherently and were focused on directions that the team felt best met their goal as a PLC. As one ILT member observed:

I think we were able to move in that direction where we want to be much faster because we have the time to be able to do it, we're receiving the training in a much more coherent manner, I guess, specified and I think that has helped us to be able to maintain a focus" (HMS, June 2004).

Another ILT member from HMS agreed that the focus and direction provided by the District enabled the team to effectively define and meet their goals as PLCs:

I think that we... tried to continue to define the priorities and maintain the focus of what they [CILT] gave us. We kind of kept what was valuable, what we believed in, ...and we kept, I think for the first time in my [number of years served] we maintained that focus on vocabulary and some of the things from the beginning of the year to the end. Maybe it was that we didn't know everything the whole time, but it was the first time I felt in June that we were still doing the same things that we started in August. (HMS, June, 2004)

Both the ratings on the ILT survey items and the interview comments revealed a new attitude on the part of ILTs with regard to their previous "This, too, shall pass." attitude. The continuous messages on vision and through training were productive in guiding school ILTs to focus their efforts. The need to quantify the efforts of the school ILTs, much like the District data quantified the efforts of the CILT, remains present. The messages were also sent by the ILT comments that the efforts of the District to keep schools focused are necessary and productive.

Perceptions of District Actions in Monitoring and Oversight District Actions

Data presented in Table 5.5 revealed that monitoring and oversight comprised 0% during the planning stage of Suburban School District's initiative to create PLCs, and only 7% of District actions in implementing the initiative. Data summarized in

Table 6.1 reveals that 100% of the CILT perceived that the District engaged in few actions focused on monitoring and oversight. Similarly, 60% of the school-based ILTs perceived that the District had done little in monitoring and oversight of activities focused on creating PLCs. Fifty per cent of the CILT described the monitoring and oversight activities of the District as moderately helpful, whereas the other 50% perceived monitoring and oversight as not helpful. Only 20% of the ILT perceived District monitoring and oversight as being moderately helpful and 50% viewed it as not helpful.

Several of the school-based ILTs commented on the need for the CILT to do more to hold schools accountable for meeting District goals. This implied that they perceived a need for greater District monitoring and oversight and greater focus on setting expectations that were defined and communicated. An ILT member from RWMS stated the following:

But I can tell you, in casual conversation, there are schools that still aren't going to be changing. I mean, they are going to be looking at changing, but, I mean, you know, honestly we just need a memo to come from [the Superintendent's] office to tell us, this is what it is, have it, report to your director. I mean, and then you can do some accountability. That doesn't mean we can't be flexible and be sensitive to local needs and the unique characteristics of each of our schools. (RWMS, July, 2004)

Another member from RWMS shared the view that an increased District emphasis on accountability would be helpful:

...I don't think there needs to be an accountability system that's going to ... bring shame to anybody, but it would just help [if the District made sure that] expectations are clear. I wouldn't have a problem filling out a report every quarter [asking]. How many times did your ILT team meet? on what dates? What topics did you cover? . But, you know, the expectations have not been clear enough for us to get the biggest bang out of this initiative. (RWMS, July, 2004)

Similar concerns about the need for increased oversight by the CILT were expressed by an ILT member from another school. This person believed that the CILT members should visit schools in order to gain a fuller understanding of the work underway by the ILTs in supporting school-based PLCs:

Not once, did somebody from central office even come down to see... what types of things we were doing Nobody ever did, so ... how are you going to assess how effective we were doing some things in our building? Do they really know what we did or is that a condition, does anyone really care, as long as we have the meeting? (AMS, June, 2004)

Another member of AMS acknowledged the importance of District oversight and monitoring as it occurred informally during the implementation year's weekly Friday training sessions for ILTs. During these sessions members of ILTs had the opportunity to share concerns and developments with each other and members of the CILT. For this ILT member, such informal monitoring and oversight was valuable:

I'm thinking back to how I felt in late June when we had the leadership meetings and how I found it interesting that we were returning to this again. And as someone who attended those Friday meetings I felt like there was always a strand that ran through those days all year and there was talk about the work of PLC's, even if we were just doing it on break, one to another and talking about what was going on in our building and how things were operating and so on and so forth. (AMS, June, 2004)

A member of the ILT came back to this topic later in the discussion to note the changes planned and shared by the CILT for the following year, which was outside the scope of this study by asking, "Can I just go back to your question, I mean, I'm still drawn to this maintaining focus and monitoring and oversight..." (AMS, June, 2004).

An ILT member from an elementary school questioned the meaning of oversight and monitoring by the District:

I don't know about monitoring and oversight. I'm a little bit perplexed about that. Whose monitoring, whose oversight? If by monitoring we mean filling

out bubble sheets to determine allocation of time of specific individuals, I suppose that's monitoring. Oversight again, I'm a little perplexed as to who is providing oversight because wouldn't they, if that were the case, need to visit each school and determine themselves the extent to which PLC's are in evidence and if that happened I guess I wasn't around when it happened because I haven't seen it. (MDES, June, 2004)

A Military Drive ILT member expressed frustration at the District's failure to monitor school developments:

That part hasn't been done and ... I think the district needs to self-reflect and evaluate because we are pretty much monitoring ourselves, which is fine and there's a level of trust there and that's professionalism and that's good, but I think from time to time it might be nice to do things like what you're doing now to get feedback and let people talk about it honestly, how are things going along, what do we need to do, what support do we need from the district to do to get better because those are all key points. (MDES, June, 2004)

ILT members also viewed the District's monitoring and oversight actions as important to school accountability. Some suggested that the CILT needed to engage in more monitoring and oversight to ensure that all school ILTs were meeting defined expectations, just as school administrators needed to engage in monitoring and oversight of teachers. At the same time, an ILT member from AMS acknowledged that oversight should occur in the context of expectations of ILT professionalism:

So we did [the things suggested by the CILT] ...but I know, like anything else, there are schools [that did not], because I heard one principal say, "why do we have to meet as an ILT team?" and then I'm thinking "oh my goodness." That same issue is a school-based issue. It's an accountability issue with administrators, teachers, some teachers are more dedicated and work harder and put in more time than other teachers and we're in a profession where there is some autonomy, individual autonomy, school autonomy, and even though we'd like to see everyone act at the utmost level in professional behavior, and demonstrate professional behavior- that's not always the case. (AMS, June, 2004)

The comments on monitoring and oversight suggested that the various ILTs wanted to see an increase in the extent of use of this District action for two purposes.

One purpose of the monitoring was to check to see if other school's ILTs were meeting defined expectations. The second purpose for the desired increase in monitoring and oversight action on the part of the CILT was that many ILTs wanted CILT members to come and view the things that the schools were doing with the training and support they had received from the District. This use of the action of monitoring and oversight was perceived to be a positive action, with CILT visits as opportunities to reinforce the work of ILT members and teachers. An ILT from one middle school observed that, in addition to supporting the work done by ILTs, visits by the CILT were important for teachers because, "The teachers ... felt they were validated when someone from central office [came] down" (AMS, June, 2004).

ILTs were pleased to learn that in the year following the implementation year, the CILT planned to visit schools as part of monitoring and oversight. One ILT from AMS observed:

..what I really [like]about that schedule for next year, besides the fact that AP's will be pulled into that a little bit more intentionally and the new people will be brought up to speed, is that the Central Leadership Team will be visiting buildings In terms of monitoring and oversight and making sure that focus is there, I think that's going to be another smart move they're making and make sure, we hoping, that there will be a little bit more consistency of that happening. (AMS, June, 2004)

Monitoring and oversight actions by the District have tremendous pay offs in several ways. The use of monitoring provides feedback data that can be used to refine District actions and make them more responsive to the needs of the ILTs. At times the phrase "What's inspected is expected." applied to the work of the ILTs. The fact that the CILT were gathering data or visiting to see something in action sent a message that schools had best be implementing the expectations that were

communicated. Even more important was the perspective that in person monitoring provided to CILT members. The degree of skill in a specific area became more fully understood following in-person monitoring. This provided data for future staff development.

Perceptions of District Actions in Defining Roles and Responsibilities

While 75% of the CILT members perceived that the District was active in defining roles and responsibilities, 40% of the ILTs perceived that the District did little in this regard. Sixty per cent of ILTs perceived the District to be moderately or highly active in defining roles and responsibilities. The review of the artifacts categorized by District action (Table 5.5) revealed that 12.2% of District actions during the planning year of the PLC initiative involved aspects of defining roles and responsibilities and 11.7% of District actions during the implementation year involved defining roles and responsibilities.

Although 75% of the CILT perceived that a high degree of District leadership activity centered on defining roles and responsibilities, 75% of the CILT also perceived that these actions were not helpful. Sixty per cent of the ILTs viewed the District as either highly or moderately involved in defining roles and responsibilities. Seventy per cent of ILTs perceived the District's actions pertaining to the definition of roles and responsibilities as being helpful. This suggested that the CILT felt less helpful for their efforts in defining roles and responsibilities than was perceived by the ILTs, who generally saw their (CILT) efforts as being helpful.

Other members of ILTs complained that the lack of clear definition of roles and responsibilities created challenges. Mentor teachers assigned to two schools had

to learn to interpret the different expectations that principals of those schools held about their work. Sometimes a principal's expectations were different from those that were shared in training sessions for mentors. Comments from CES highlighted the challenges perceived by the one mentor teacher member who was assigned in two schools:

I thought the defining roles and responsibilities was challenging ...[because] of working at two different schools, the way that the administration used me was completely different I worked with new teachers, but as a mentor, ... I had gone to training and they said, you're going to be doing this, I wasn't doing that and you know, at some places and at other places I was. So it was very difficult to find out this year exactly where I was, what my responsibilities were because I had three different people [giving me directions]. I had two principals and then I had people giving me training and the messages that I got from all three of those people were different, so it took awhile to kind of see what would work for everybody and I feel good about it, because at the end of the year, I feel like, well we did a lot of good things, but it was, the fact that our roles weren't defined as clearly to everybody and we weren't hearing the same message I think made it more difficult for me. (CES, July, 2004)

Other ILT members found their roles similarly confusing. One member, responsible for supporting mentors and assistant principals (APs) explained:

And I think that was the real hard part at the beginning of the year because those roles weren't defined as clearly as in the past and yet, as we got into it, I couldn't work any other way than to continue doing what I've always done and that is to communicate and share and support with them and bring them on board and not only with mentors but with AP's when they're new. (CES, July, 2004)

Despite the data that indicated that 12.2% of District actions in the planning year were focused on defining roles and responsibilities and 11.7% of District actions similarly focused during the implementation year, there were strong perceptions that the roles were defined very little or too late:

...because the reorganization of the structure of the school was putting the mentor/teacher and the instructional facilitator in place, I think at first we

were very unclear as to why [this was done, although] I think we knew why, but we didn't know what the roles were and then we didn't find out the roles in a timely fashion and people were in place, but didn't know how to interact with one another or what the responsibilities were so that it actually, I think, [took up] time and that could have been time more wisely used. (AMS, June, 2004)

One ILT member expressed concerns that the instructional facilitator (IF) was engaged in responsibilities that were not part of what they viewed as the defined role for the IF and wanted the District to define the role more clearly. The District “should be able to say, ‘here’s what instructional facilitators can do in the buildings’ and ‘here’s what they should not do’ (RWMS, July, 2004).

Another school ILT member recalled the CILT efforts at training sessions to define roles and responsibilities as helpful:

the strategy [used by the CILT] of defining roles and responsibilities, ... was nicely illustrated by the use of the five circles graphic and it was nice to see it spelled out with regard to [name] and the administration and the teachers and the instructional facilitator - a who does what exactly, since it is still relatively new with the way we are operating within the organization. (MDES, June, 2004)

Some ILT members recognized that understanding of roles and responsibilities had to evolve over time. This view was shared by an ILT member from MDES:

I think that the roles and responsibilities have been evolving this year. I think people were very unsure of what was going on back in the Fall and I think we still have a long way to go..., but people ... are beginning to see things a little bit more clearly, it's beginning to come into focus a little bit more as we work through this... (MDES, June, 2004)

A member from the Level High ILT also viewed as helpful the efforts of the CILT to define roles and responsibilities:

Defining roles and responsibilities, I think when they restructured they were very clear, well, they made a strong attempt at that to let IF's know what IF's do and what mentors do and what they don't do and I always had the feeling, because with being a mentor it was evaluative, she was always very clear and

she always let us know, “uh we’re getting into something that might be a little bit more evaluative, which isn’t [my responsibility], or [she would indicate that this is my responsibility], so I thought that the [responsibilities of new] roles as the year went along it became much clearer. (LHS, June, 2004)

Notably, views held about the clarity of the District’s definition of roles and responsibilities by members of the same school ILT sometimes differed. In contrast to the previous comment, another member of LHS felt that the District had not provided adequate definition of roles and responsibilities to allow those holding the new roles to be effective in supporting the development of PLCs.

The quantitative and the qualitative perspectives on this District action emphasize the importance of the District understanding that putting new structures in place does not mean that staff will understand how to function within those structures. This was evident in the actions of the reorganized reporting lines at the executive staff level and at the level of the newly formed ILTs. Attention and support to new roles and relationships must occur over time. The fact that relationships plays such an important role in both the cultural system and the individual systems of the social systems model should inform the District that this area of need has substantial power to negatively influence the desired culture change if it is not addressed.

Perceptions of District Actions in Communicating Vision Messages

The District action of communicating vision messages referred to the CILT taking multiple opportunities to reinforce the work and strategies of developing PLCs in all schools. Communicating vision messages was a District action that helped to develop the vocabulary of the vision and create increasingly clear conceptions of what PLCs should be. Members of the CILT did not perceive the District to have

engaged in extensive communication of messages about what PLCs should involve. Conversely, 60% of the school-based ILTs perceived the District to have been moderately to highly active in communicating vision messages. The analysis of the District's artifacts revealed that approximately 7% of the District action during both the planning and implementation years of the PLC initiative were focused on communicating vision messages.

On the individual surveys, 100% of the CILT members viewed this District action as not helpful. Conversely, 70% of the school-based ILTs perceived the District action of communicating vision messages as moderately helpful or helpful. Once again, we see a District action that is viewed by the CILT as neither extensively used, nor particularly helpful, yet viewed by the school leadership as generally helpful. Why is this? What need of the schools is met through this action, yet not understood by the CILT? Even apparently little effort by the District to communicate vision messages about the nature and focus of the PLC initiative appeared to be perceived as helpful by the ILTs.

During the structured interviews the ILTs made no specific comments about the District engaging in the communication of vision messages. In fact, one ILT member from MDES claimed never to have seen any documents about the District's vision of the PLC initiative. This perception was different than another member from the same school who expressed the following, "When I went to Ed Leadership last year for training in August, I thought that [the Superintendent] did an excellent job in sharing her enthusiasms, her passion and vision [about PLCs] with everybody there" (MDES, July, 2004).

It appears that despite District efforts, ILTs had only a vague sense of the District's vision for the direction of the PLC initiative.

Summary of Reactions to District Actions

The summarized data from the analysis of archival documents of the District revealed that the District engaged in all ten of the actions gleaned from the reviews of case studies of other district reform initiatives. The District took those actions to varying degrees in the planning and implementation years of the PLC initiative. The percentage of the action in each year in which any specific District action was used varied in intensiveness between the two years. Because all of the actions highlighted in this study were used by the District during the time period that defined the study, application of the adapted social system model suggests that all four of the systems were addressed. Either the external environment or the internal inter-related factors created the need to address issues or factors from each of the four systems. The summary data revealed a heavy emphasis on structural system issues.

The individual reviews of each District action reported in this chapter demonstrated that the way an individual ILT member responded on individual surveys was often different than the perceptions they revealed in their interview comments. Data analysis and findings reported in Chapter 5 allow the researcher to respond to the research question investigating the actions the District took in supporting the development of PLCs across all District schools. Analysis of District artifacts revealed that a variety of actions were taken in both the planning and implementation years as summarized in Table 5.5. These actions went beyond reorganization, which was reported in the literature as an action used too frequently

and in isolation in reform efforts (Fullan, 2001). As reported in Chapter 5, one of the actions taken most frequently by the District was assessing the needs of the district and schools, and using the data to develop or refine the PLC initiative. The second most frequently taken action was training. Analysis also revealed that during the planning and implementation years of the initiative, to varying degrees the District undertook actions directed in three areas: reorganization, defining vision/values/beliefs, and monitoring and oversight. The artifact evidence documents that District actions were varied and intense in both the planning year and the implementation year.

Table 5.3 shows that the District actions addressed all of the systems of the social system model for schools and districts. While the proportion of structural system action was consistent between planning and implementation years, the extent of District action that addressed the political, cultural, and individual system issues differed in these stages. This suggested that the District adapted its actions to the needs of the system dynamics present at the time of each decision action.

The interpretation of data and findings in this chapter responded to the second research question: What was the perception of key school leaders, the ILT members, of the impact of District actions on developing PLCs in the schools? Nine of the ten District actions examined in this study were perceived as helpful by 60% to 100% of school-based ILTs. This suggested that 60% to 100% of District actions were generally helpful to the ILTs in supporting their efforts to develop PLCs.

Of special interest is the District action of monitoring and oversight, which was viewed by 50% of the ILTs as not helpful and viewed by only 20% of all ILTs as

being of any help at all. Despite these reported perceptions on individual surveys, the comments of the ILT members urged the District to engage in increased monitoring and oversight to validate school actions and to ensure system-wide school accountability for addressing the expectations for implementing the PLC initiative. Also of special interest are three District actions that were perceived as helpful by the ILTs but not helpful by the CILT. These three actions included: defining vision, values, and beliefs; communicating vision messages; and, defining roles and responsibilities. Why the perceptions of the CILT varied so greatly from the perceived helpfulness reported by the ILTs is unclear. To what would one attribute such differences?

ILT Perceived Progress in Developing PLCs in Their Schools

As a component of the individual surveys conducted with ILT members prior to the structured interviews, the ILTs were asked to rate the amount of progress they felt that they had made in developing PLCs in their schools. These data were gathered as a means of checking the perceptions of ILTs on how things were going in their individual schools. This provided one way of viewing how the implementers of the initiative may be making sense of the PLC model. These data tell us something about the degree to which the ILTs felt that they made some sense of the actions and requirements of the District with regard to PLC development.

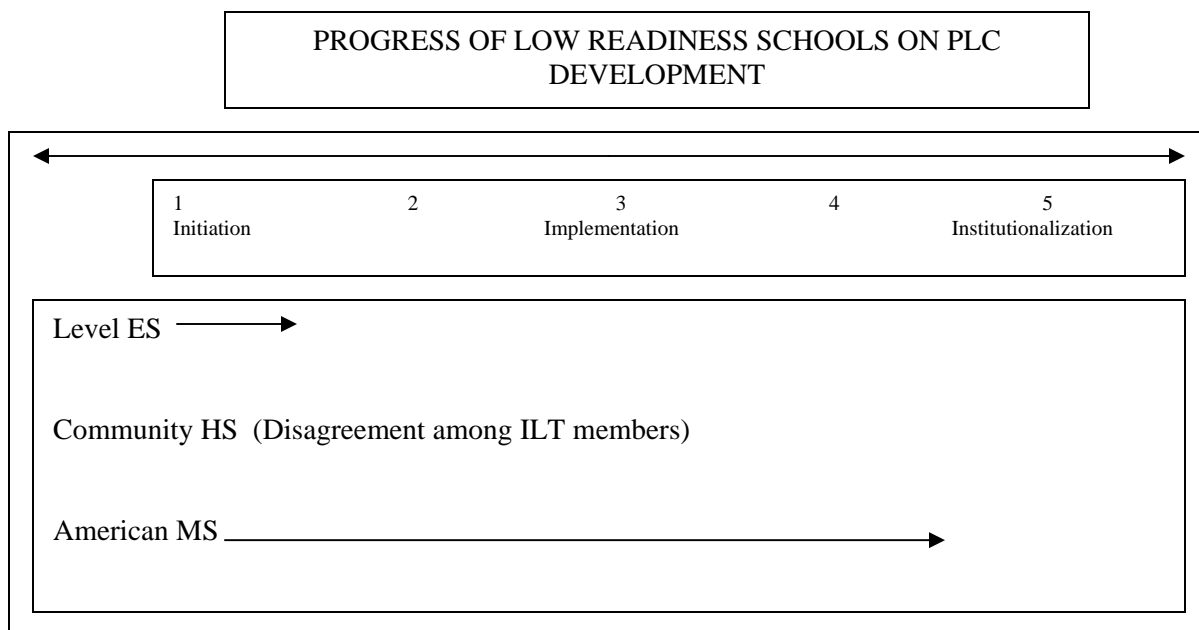
In August 2003, prior to the implementation of the initiative, all district schools administered the Learning Organization (SLO) survey to their entire faculty. The staffs were asked to express their perceptions of the existence of the conditions of a learning organization in their respective schools. The items on the SLO survey

addressed five dimensions defined as elements of a learning school (Meehan, Orletsky, & Sattes, 1997) including “Principal’s Facilitative Leadership,” “Shared Vision for Improvement,” “Collective Creativity and Learning,” “Classroom Observations and Feedback,” and “School Conditions and Capacities.” A total instrument score is also reported.

Subsequently, as part of its research on the helpfulness of District actions to help ILTs overcome the challenges faced by schools in creating PLCs, the CILT conducted case studies of ten district schools. Schools selected for the case studies were identified as either high or low readiness schools based on the results of the SLO Survey. In June 2004, the ILT members of the study schools were asked to rate the level of progress they had made in developing PLCs in their school. A Likert-type scale was used for the progress rating. *Figures 6.1* shows the progress of the low PLC readiness schools and *Figure 6.2* shows the progress perceived by the ILTs of the high PLC readiness schools. In the section that follows, I discuss the perceptions of ILTs in low PLC readiness schools concerning their progress in becoming a professional learning community.

ILT Perceptions of PLC Progress in Low Readiness Schools

Figure 6.1 ILT Perception of Progress of Low Readiness Schools in Developing PLCs



Level Elementary School

Level Elementary School (LES) had an enrollment of 384 full-time students at the time of the study. Fifteen per cent of the student body were documented as having educational disabilities, while 14.7% were eligible for free or reduced meal programs. The student body was 94% White, 2.8% African-American, and 3.1% other Non-White. No students in the school receive services for English Language Learners. On the 2004 State testing to meet the requirements of *NCLB*, 80.3% of students met proficiency standards in reading and 72.6% met proficiency standards in mathematics. The school was not on the needs improvement list at the time of the study, nor had it ever been on that list. Sixty-two per cent of the teaching staff had more than ten years of experience in 2004 and 81.8% of the teachers had already earned their Advanced Professional Certificate. See Appendix I for complete demographic data on all study schools.

The Level Elementary School faculty ratings of their school on the SLO placed the school as the fourth lowest in PLC readiness of the 32 elementary schools in the Suburban District. The faculty ratings of the dimension on “Principal’s Facilitative Leadership” ranked the school second lowest of all elementary schools in the District. The “shared visions for improvement” dimension results ranked the school higher than only one-third of the elementary schools, “collective creativity and learning” was higher than only two other schools, and the “school conditions and capacities” dimension was higher than one-third of the other elementary schools.

When speaking of the development of PLCs during the structured interview conducted in June 2004, members of the ILT had the following interchange indicating that they felt they had received support and help in developing PLCs:

Speaker #1: I think the collective learning and application of the new strategies and new concepts on the Professional Learning Communities helped.

Speaker #2: I appreciate what was done at the very beginning of the school year when [the consultant] provided an overview and examples for what his school district did and gave us some strategies to use as far as our beginning of establishing within the schools.... I think as we worked together we often used those references, especially in the beginning parts of the year as we were talking about how to we get to this particular level ...[of] implementation.

Speaker #3: I really think that the Superintendent has been a successful leader and the CILT folks have really provided leadership and a commitment to the rest of us in implementing these things.

Speaker #1: And I would say the supportive conditions and the improvised staff development, [the Superintendent] was always positive in her “go ahead and do it” [approach] and it was very open ended, which I think is a good thing. On the other hand sometimes, it felt so open ended that you were trying to build a structure that you weren’t quite sure how it should look. (LES, June, 2004)

The ILT members described a staff that is functioning at different levels as members of the school's PLC:

Speaker #1: I think the staff is at a different level of understanding what Professional Learning Communities are. There have been some staff members, I believe, who embraced it and [said] yep, this is important. Evidence of [their understanding of PLCs is that] without my asking... a group of people ... picked up a book and studied and discussed it. This did not involve everybody ... It was a small community, but it was evidence that there was interest and an internal need to collaborate with fellow colleagues.

Speaker #2: I think it has to do with what their perception of what a Professional Learning Community is. And it's meant to be taking personal responsibility for individual growth and in some instances, I see people doing that, that's in the center group that you're talking about, but then I also see people seeing it as autonomy, not to participate in some [loud bell drowned out sound] of curriculum and implementation. I guess I don't think they see how the valuation goes along with looking at what you do and improving what you do on a daily basis in the classroom. It's kind of like a sensing of themselves as "I'm ok," ...

Speaker #3: Well, quite honestly, there are some people who are saying, this is one more thing we have to do. .. [Some teachers] embrace [PLCs] and feel that it should be part of their professional growth... [they also believe] that it is what is expected of Suburban District Schools. But there are also those that [say] well, this is just one more thing and this too shall pass and we'll move on, I will be passively accepting, but really be passive with resistance to what is taking place.

I'm not sure if [these teachers] understand that collaborating with their peers and reflecting on their own teaching [is useful] and [they] don't think that it provides them that professional growth, but it takes time. (LES, June, 2004)

Despite sharing some evidence that teachers are engaged in collaborative learning, for the most part ILT members from Level Elementary suggested that they have a great deal of work to do to increase understanding of the nature and benefits of PLCs among teachers in the school. They described some teachers in the school as lacking understanding of and interest in becoming a PLC, others as passively engaged in PLC-like activities.

Community High School

At the time of the study CHS had a student enrollment of 1,053 full-time students. The racial composition of the student body was 64.2% White, 30.5% African-American, and 5.2% other Non-White. Almost 14% of the students had identified disabilities, with 20.9% of students eligible for free or reduced meal programs. No students received the services for English Language Learners. On the State testing for federal *NCLB* reporting, 65.5% of the students reached proficiency levels in reading and 37% were proficient in mathematics. The school was not, nor had it ever been, on the “needs improvement list.” Only 25% of the teachers had more than ten years of experience at the time of the study, and 28.9% had earned an Advanced Professional Certificate.

The results of the SLO Survey indicated that this high school had the lowest rating of all secondary schools in the District on the dimension of “principal facilitative leadership.” On the dimension of “shared visions for improvement” the faculty rated their school the third lowest of the nine high schools in the District. In “collective creativity and learning” and “school conditions and capacities” the school ranked higher than only one of the nine high schools, with the total instrument score ranking higher than only one of the District’s nine high schools.

Many ILT members from CHS commented about the progress made on their PLC development. One observed that, unlike members of the ILT, teachers in the school were in their infancy in understanding and developing into PLCs because of issues of territoriality and their focus on other instructional demands:

PLCs are in their infancy with the teachers. I mean, our ILT operates as a professional learning community. We were able to get going faster than the

teachers are, because they're still... territorial. [In addition they were focused on the use of strategies to increase student vocabulary] so a lot of the inservice was geared to how to use [vocabulary]..., to improve instruction. Ok now the next step is getting them organized into their professional learning communities themselves, how do you do that? And that's in its infancy. (CHS, June, 2004)

The facilitator of the interview asked the ILT members what challenges they faced in making progress on their PLC development. One member responded:

I think there's one [thing] and that is that our [instructional] facilitator is at two different schools and many of the time allocations were given to the secondary level and so she had to make a choice of whether she was going to be here or there and really did an excellent job at trying to make her time equal, but to fully implement PLC's you need to fully fund the positions [for each school] and it doesn't work - or change [the organization of service delivery] and have [the instructional facilitator at] this high school on this day and this middle school on the next day [for professional development], which then doubles what the person is doing, so I don't know that there is an appropriate answer for that, but it was difficult. (CHS, June 2004)

Another ILT member from CHS described the number of PLCs that existed in a faculty of about one hundred people:

There was beginning evidence of some PLC [activity] between [teachers], there were a couple of teachers [who were] un-collaborative [that] were meeting on their planning period ... on their own initiative. They started doing that so that was definitely a PLC. I would say that, [there are] probably less than five... PLC's ... in school this year, but they were, for the most part, things that people decided to do on their own, I mean there was no mandate or no director that said that you must start this. (CHS, June, 2004)

Although ILT members of CHS rated their school as in stages of initiating or early implementation of PLCs, their comments suggested that the school was in very early stages of the development as a PLC. Their comments further revealed that the ILT had given a high level of focus on a school initiated technology initiative that distracted from the focus on PLCs. The District would benefit from knowing the individual focuses that schools may have that interact with systemic initiatives. CILT

reflection and help with how school initiatives and systemic initiatives can work together may be a support that schools could benefit from.

American Middle School

American Middle School had an enrollment of 1,299 students at the time of the study. Almost 21% of the students had documented disabilities, while 39% of students were eligible for free and reduced meals. The student body was comprised of 57.5% White students, 34.5% African-American students, and 7.8% other Non-White students. Less than one per cent (0.5%) of students received services for English Language Learners. On the 2004 State testing program 50.3% of students achieved proficiency level in reading and 31.6% of students were proficient or above in mathematics. The school was placed on the needs improvement list as a result of the 2004 testing scores not meeting “adequate yearly progress (AYP)” for the second year in a row. The category in which the school missed making AYP both in 2003 and 2004 was for students with disabilities. Only 23% of the teachers at the school had more than ten years of experience at the time of the study. Forty-five per cent had earned an Advanced Professional Certificate.

A review of the dimension scores on the SLO Survey revealed that the AMS staff rated the dimensions of “principal’s facilitative leadership,” “shared visions for improvement,” and “school conditions and capacities” as the lowest of all eight middle schools in the district. When compared to all 17 secondary schools, this school was rated by the faculty as the second lowest in these dimensions. On the dimension of “collective creativity and learning” the faculty rated this school second lowest of the eight middle schools and seventh lowest when compared to the 17

secondary schools. Only once did another middle school score lower than AMS on a dimension rating. All other schools rated lower on the dimensions were high schools, which typically scored slightly lower than middle schools. The total SLO Survey score for American Middle School was the lowest of all middle schools.

The comments made during the structured interview were reviewed to explore why the school ILT perceived that the school had made such good progress in developing PLCs despite the beginning readiness level of “low.” They included:

Well look at the fact, that fortunately for [school name], we share each of those five dimensions. I think we have a strong knowledge base and we sat down and learned where we want the PLC’s to go and we talk about things together, we share things that we want to share in our PLC, we’re all one in same accord, and we go through the PLC’s to do the same thing, we come back again and we talk about the outcomes of those PLC’s and what we could have done differently or what was good about those things. Initially we recognized the need to restructure. So, not only was the central office doing some restructuring, we did some restructuring in this building. (AMS, June, 2004)

Another ILT member described how the school utilized PLCs as:

We each have a PLC, although we come together and meet as an ILT team. Each of the administrators has a PLC that when we want to do some specific servicing of special development we do it through our PLC’s and we disseminate certain information and it was a natural thing for [name] to do eighth grade and [name] seventh and [name] sixth because they are at the grade levels that they work with. I have a specialty area of people and I held regular PLC meetings monthly just like they held regular PLC meetings with those individuals and we were all operating off the same page giving everybody the same information and one of the things in particular, because I had the special area people in PE that are many times left out of the loop because they’re not a part of the team. The feedback from them was that they felt they at least had someone listening and they were getting information that everybody else was getting. (AMS, June, 2004)

The descriptions of PLC use continued as the interview proceeded:

Speaker #1: Through the PLC’s they all read the book “Listen Up Teachers.” And then we had discussion on that:

Speaker #2: Well, we established a lot of PLC's. We had one amongst our administrative team, we had a whole faculty PLC, and we had grade level PLC's, we had a new teacher PLC that met months late. I would say that every meeting we've had this year has had a learning focus, either learning for kids or learning for adults. And so that's a shift in how we used to hold business meetings ...they [used to be focused on] all management ...[now] there has been a shift in that at least some portion of each meeting deals with personal/professional growth that affects student achievement. [and also we discussed and used] assessments with a grade level PLC, [and] we did climate surveys.

Speaker #3: . . . I looked at professional learning communities and invited teachers to take ownership of their own professional development and I had ten teachers ... [in] a learning club that ...met monthly at the [restaurant]. We had a monthly focus and everybody had five minutes to tell their focus uninterrupted and what time was left in the discussion was open forum and then we'd take a new discussion topic.

Speaker #4: We discussed everything from incentives with students, before/during and after a reading strategy, motivating kids to learn a lot of things that focused on instruction and you know, I guess I always thought, because I was only kind of overseeing and facilitating the discussion that [I needed to be present in the PLC meeting in order for members to] stay on track, but I know coming a half an hour late one time ... [I found] the discussion was on and everybody was still in rotation taking their turns ... There were probably 10 teachers involved in that and out of the 10, seven were real committed and were probably there every month. (AMS, June, 2004)

Although the comments of the ILT members did not specifically reflect what they thought about their progress on PLCs, their descriptions of the use of this job-embedded professional development model did reflect their pride and excitement in their work and the work of their teachers. District leadership could benefit from ways to understand schools that may think their progress is greater than perceived by outsiders of the school ILT. Ways of assessing reality from perceptions for purposes of coaching and supporting schools more effectively are needed.

Summary Comments about Low Readiness Schools

The socio-demographic profiles of students and teachers varied considerably in the three low readiness schools. The school levels represented elementary, middle, and high schools. The poverty level in these three schools ranged from 14.7% to 39.2%. A large difference existed in the experience level of the teachers across these three schools. The proportion of teachers with ten or more years of experience ranged from 23% to 62%. A similarly large span existed across schools in the proportion of teachers with an Advanced Professional Certificate, ranging from 28.9% to 81.8%. Only one of the three low readiness schools was on the needs improvement list or ever had been. The difference in racial composition of the low readiness schools also varied. The proportion of White student population in these three schools ranges from 57.5% to 94.0%, and the proportion of African-American students was from 2.8% to 34.5%. The demographics of these three schools do not present a consistent pattern of a specific type of school that would often be described as a challenging school. Two of the schools were located in a similar area of the District along the same interstate highway, while the other was located in mid-suburbia.

Some of the comments made by members of the low readiness school ILTs suggested that some teachers who were not ready to buy into the initiative and that these teachers felt that the PLC initiative would just go away if they waited it out. Other comments suggested that the teachers had not yet mastered the conceptual basis of PLCs and that the process of doing so would take time.

The descriptions of the working PLCs from the low readiness schools suggest that the PLCs are often led by the ILT members. Indeed there was some surprise on the part of one ILT member when teachers in the PLC they facilitated continued discussions on their own when the ILT member was late. This perception suggested a sense that the PLCs are not functioning independently.

ILT Perceptions of PLC Progress in High Readiness Schools

Six of the schools identified for study were considered high readiness PLC schools based on the initial scores on the SLO Survey. This high PLC readiness rating was based on the reported perceptions of the school faculties on the survey. *Figure 6.3* shows the progress that the high PLC schools made in the implementation of PLCs in their schools, as reported by the ILT members. There were four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school in this group of six high PLC readiness schools. The schools were located in the far southern part of Suburban County, mid-county, and in the northern rural region of the county.

Hoyle Middle School

Hoyle Middle School had 935 full-time students at the time of the study. Eighteen per cent of these students were documented as disabled students who received special education services. Less than five students in the school received services for English Language Learners. The racial composition of students at HMS was comprised of 61.3% White, 33.5% African-American, and 5.0% other Non-White students. Approximately 37% of the students were eligible for free and reduced meal programs.

On the 2004 State academic testing to meet the requirements of the *NCLB Act*, 62.6% of the students at the school met proficiency levels in reading, and 37.1% met proficiency levels in mathematics. Hoyle Middle School was not on the “needs improvement list,” nor had it ever been. Analysis revealed that 32% of the teachers had ten or more years of experience. Approximately 41% of the teachers had already earned an Advanced Professional Certificate. Analysis of the PLC progress survey revealed that in general their ILT members perceived that the school progressed to a level of early implementation of PLCs.

Of the eight middle schools in the Suburban District, only two others had scored as high in perceived PLC readiness as HMS. All three schools were higher than the combined 17 secondary schools in the District. Review of the data on the teachers’ perceptions of the presence of individual dimensions of PLC indicated that only one secondary school scored higher than HMS in “principal’s facilitative leadership.” On the “shared visions for improvement” dimension, seven of the other secondary schools were perceived to have a higher presence of the conditions of this dimension. Two other secondary schools, both middle schools, were perceived by their staffs as having a higher degree of conditions related to the dimension of “collective creativity and learning” and “school conditions and capacities.” The two middle schools rated as having more PLC dimension elements present were always the same two middle schools.

When the ILT discussed the operation of PLCs in their school during the structured interview, there were areas of concern that arose in teacher ability to

participate in PLCs. The following discussion illustrates some of the issues raised by ILTs:

Speaker #1: I see that in the classrooms ...the problem is time, and when you're talking about spending your time after school making parent phone calls, grading papers, planning, good lessons that require a lot of time, ... it's hard to ask people to squeeze more in even though I know we will improve and some people already do have a good PLC.at a school like this where there is a major concern and a lot of time is spent on parent phone calls, letters home, documenting this and documenting that, or parent conferences coming in, it doesn't leave as much time as you would like to move ahead and sometimes you're just trying to keep going and especially for people who have other obligations outside like graduate school, and.... it's very hard. If you could fit the time in during the day that would be ideal, because then you do have the team time...[Also] it's fun to meet with people who have the same interests as you, whether it be in a content or discipline area...

Speaker #3: And make it no risk so that people want to do it and then if they find it overwhelming they're not ashamed.

Speaker #2: We're doing one study group on grades because we had the issue of needing to ... sit and look at our grading practices we're going to do [this] for no purpose except for us to study and look and then say where do we need to go from here with that.

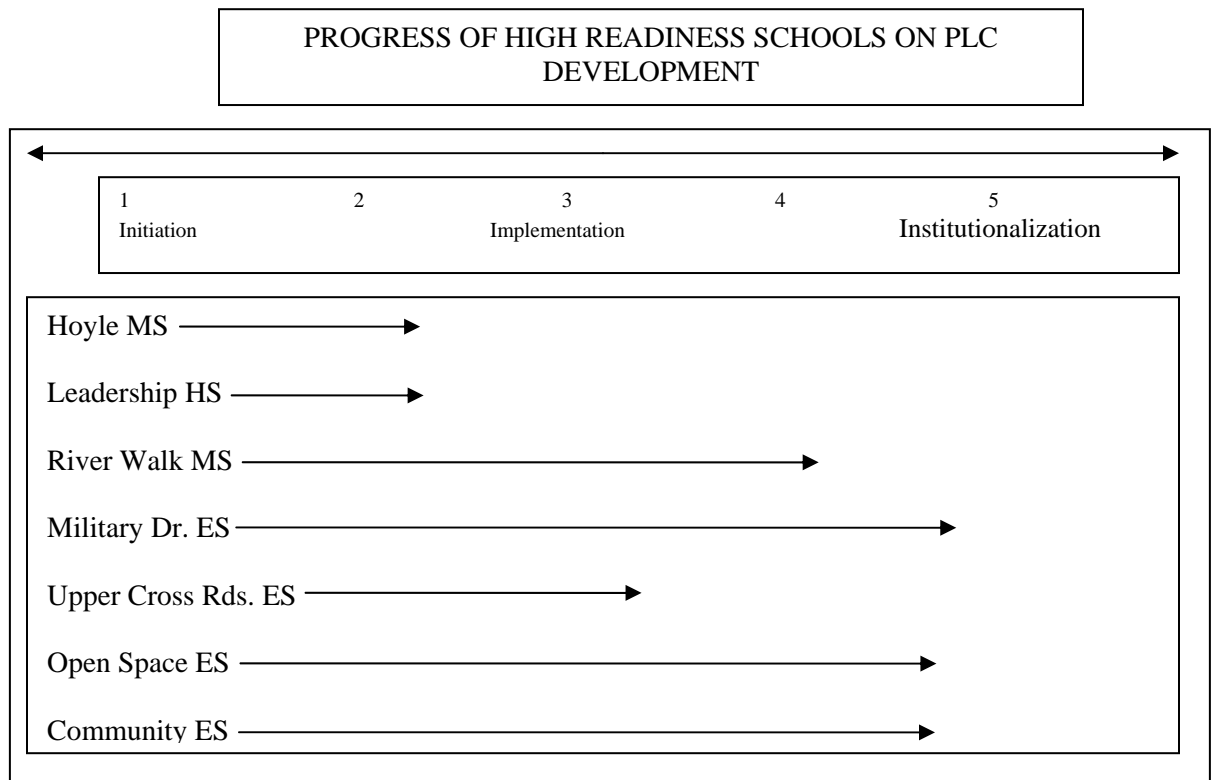
Speaker #3: Personally, I'm hoping that the school gets to the point where they value the fact that they are part of the professional learning team, that they understand the impact of that and therefore, they turn their classrooms to be more like communities. (HMS, June, 2004)

In further discussion, ILT members described how professional development focused on language-related instructional activities that had been undertaken in ways that fostered teacher collaboration; and in so doing, helped foster the development of PLCs. One ILT member commented on the team's efforts to intentionally emphasize PLC building processes through specific content-focused professional development.

Although the ILT member's perceptions at this school were that the school had only progressed to the early implementation level, the dialogue during the interview suggested that there had been intentional plans to move PLCs forward.

These plans were integrated into the school improvement plan and the ILT realized that accidental development of PLCs was not the way to proceed. Lack of time and competing demands for teacher time were identified as a critical barrier to the development of PLCs.

Figure 6.2 ILT Perception of Progress of High Readiness Schools in Developing PLCs



Leadership High School

Leadership High School is the largest high school in the District with 1,793 full-time students. Ten per cent of the students at the school had identified disabilities and 0.3% received services for English Language Learners. Only 3.8% of

the student population were eligible for free and reduced meal programs. This school is situated in a predominantly upper middle class area of the county. At the time of the study 91% of the student population was White, 4.4% African-American, and 4.5% other Non-White students. On the State academic testing program for *NCLB*, 88.8% of the students achieved proficiency on the reading test and 64.4% reached proficiency levels in mathematics. LHS was not on the needs improvement list at the time of the study, nor had it ever been on the list. Fifty-one per cent of the teachers at this high school had ten or more years of teaching experience at the time of the study. Sixty-seven per cent of the teachers had earned an Advanced Professional Certificate. Ninety-one per cent of the students who entered the school four years earlier graduated in the data reported for 2004. The ILT from Leadership High perceived that the school had reached the level of early implementation of the conditions of PLC by the end of the implementation year of the District's PLC initiative.

A review of the comments by ILT members made about PLC functions in LHS suggested that they realize that the school was at a very early stage in the PLC development process:

Speaker #1: One of the things we did yesterday is we took a look at an article that we received last week on professional learning communities and it included three big ideas focused on collaboration, ... on ensuring that students are achieving, and using the results. And what we did is we had folks take a look at what was done back in January to identify where we had an alignment with those aspects of a PLC and where we were out of alignment with the PLC to begin to measure [where we were]. Then ... we [identified] some statements that describe the gap between where [school] is now and where we would need to be- to be a professional learning community. We really came up with just a couple of very important descriptive statements that helped give us some direction.

Speaker #2: There's a statement that talks about differences between professional learning communities and traditional schools and it's answering the question, "What did you do for students who aren't being successful?"

.... My sense is that we are still very much at the beginning of the process of moving to a professional learning community. [When] we started with it last year; one of the more urgent needs we had was dealing with technology, because some of the [professional development] programs that were implemented in this school for staff [focused on technology]. That will be less of a need in the coming year...and it's our intent to focus more on becoming a professional learning community by sharing information with the staff to help them understand what that means, sharing with them some of the work that we did in the last two days as far as [identifying] where we need to go, and especially, beginning to come to some consensus as to what we want the school to be five or six years from now and what some of the central beliefs are that we're all aiming [to adopt]. (LHS, June, 2004)

Leadership High School ILT members described themselves as a school that will begin to focus on the work of developing the conditions of PLCs in the next school year.

River Walk Middle School

River Walk Middle School was a relatively small middle school with only 657 full-time equivalent students at the time of the study. Thirty-five per cent of the teachers at this school had ten or more years of teaching experience, and almost 61% of the teachers held an Advanced Professional Certificate. Seventeen per cent of the students had diagnosed disabilities and received special education services. Less than five students at RWMS received services for students as English Language Learners. Language diversity was not a real issue in educating students at this school. The racial composition at the school during the 2003-2004 school year was 77% White, 18% African-American, and 5% other Non-White. Just over 36% of the student body was eligible for free and reduced meal programs in that school year. On the State academic testing program designed to meet the requirements of the *NCLB Act*, almost

58% of the students met proficiency levels for reading and just over 42% met proficiency levels for mathematics. The school was not on the needs improvement list at the time of the study, nor was it ever on the list prior to the study.

The teachers at River Walk rated the school the highest of the 17 District secondary schools in the perceived dimensions of “principal’s facilitative leadership,” “shared visions for improvement,” and “school conditions and capacities.” Only one school was perceived to have a higher level of conditions in the dimension of “collective creativity and learning.” This school received the highest PLC readiness total score of all 17 secondary schools in the District. This suggested that the school had been working in ways that supported the development of these conditions prior to the District initiative. The school’s ILT members reported that considerable progress had been made during the implementation year of the District PLC initiatives. However, in other schools with both higher and lower levels of assessed readiness, similar or greater progress was reported in developing PLCs during this time. The dialogue of the ILT during the structured interviews revealed that the ILT members perceived that the school had a high degree of readiness as this District initiative began. One member stated:

I don’t get it. It seems that this is a very comfortable and actual transition from the concept of instructional leadership the County has been focused on for quite a few years now, certainly since I came into administration 12 years ago. So now, we’ve taken, in the past year or so, a major step forward focusing on expanding that instructional leadership beyond just the principal, beyond just the administrators to include more people. I think probably the most significant thing that the district has done up to this point is supporting and leading the reorganization and creating the structure that allows us to have a truly representative and diverse committee, responsible for instructional leadership and from that, being able to develop and manage the professional learning communities. (RWMS, July, 2004)

Another ILT member offered several reasons why not all schools in the District were at the same point in developing PLCs in their schools:

The challenge that the district is trying to deal with though, they didn't put everybody in that same mode of change. Had they expected everybody to be meeting weekly, expected every ILT to look "like this," then we could have all struggled with this change at the same time, gotten through the, as some writers refer to it, gotten through the "groan zone" of change and then been altogether moving ahead, but ... this year, there are ILT's that are going to go through the same pains that we went through in making adjustments because they didn't, because they created a completely different definition of what an ILT is, completely different definition of PLC's and now, you know, if the County wants to bring them in line, rather than getting the pain over in one year, some schools are going to have an additional year of complaining and whining, etc. (RWMS, July, 2004)

Two ILT members described the thinking of their team as they considered the District initiative on PLCs and how it would be integrated into the work of the school:

Speaker #1: In our discussion, we wanted to get the biggest impact from the initiative. We talked about the possibility of using our existing groups within the school structure to make, to approach them more as professional learning communities and to expect them to deliver this kind of staff development and the other kinds of things that we wanted to do with PLC's in the building through those existing committees and groups and teams. And basically what we decided was ...we felt that in this building, most of those groups of teams and committees were already operating like professional learning communities within their existing domains. ...You know, a department is organized by a common content area, so they already have agenda items that they needs to deal with on a regular basis, much of that involves professional learning and that's just the climate that we've been building here over the years and it continues.

Speaker #2: I'm in the process of my decision-making right here. Anyway, we felt all of our existing committees and teams were pretty much functioning very similar to professional learning committees, we wanted to add additional staff development and to buy into the District initiative, the directive, which we were comfortable with, we're a District school so this is what we're going to do, we didn't feel that the most effective way to do that would be to add it to the discipline committees and their agendas and purposes, etc. We crafted a proposal to the school improvement team that we create separate and unique professional learning communities in our school from all of our instructional staff and their only purpose would be to focus on their own professional development, including the District directive [to develop instructional]

vocabulary strategies. The school improvement team accepted that and liked it and we made that happen. So we divided them and then we had a system we went through, but our staff was divided into ten PLCs of five each, four certificated staff and an instructional assistant or technician and we had activities throughout the year. We provided support, we provided extra time, we provided resources, we had accountability built in at mid-year, there was an opportunity, an expectation that the PLC report at our January inservice, that was the time for us to kind of take a look, not just at the content of and what we were doing with, using instructional strategies, and some PLCs had some other things that they were doing also, but it was also a time to look at the process, how were the PLC working, how did they all feel. Generally, everybody felt pretty good, let's carry it through the whole year because we, when we proposed this, we asked for a commitment through January that if it wasn't working in January then we would reconfigure and do it another way, but it was going really, really well. (RWMS, July, 2004)

This school's ILT described in specific terms evidence of several of the conditions that must exist for PLCs to effectively function in a school. The descriptions further associated improved instructional practice and the content of research-based practice as components of the dialogue that occurs in functioning PLCs.

Military Drive Elementary School

Military Drive Elementary School had 441 full-time students at the time of the study. This school served many students who lived on a local military installation and as a result served students who had received diverse approaches to instruction over the course of their elementary school careers. Almost 18% of the students had diagnosed disabilities and were on individual education plans, receiving special education services. Approximately 3% of the students received services as English Language Learners. The racial composition of the student population at the time of the study was 39.6% White, 49.4% African-American, and 10.8% other Non-White. Fifty-four per cent of the students were eligible for free and reduced meal programs.

Military Drive Elementary had been on the federal needs improvement list but was released from that list at the end of the 2002-2003 school year based on two years of meeting the AYP requirements in all subgroups. On the 2004 State assessment results, 65.7% of the students reached proficiency levels in reading and 74.5% reached proficiency in mathematics. AYP requirements were met in all subgroup areas for that testing year. Twenty-seven per cent of the teachers at the school had ten or more years of experience at the time of the study and 47% held Advanced Professional Certificates.

The ILT of MDES shared perceptions during the structured interview that revealed an alignment with a high level of readiness in the conditions of PLCs in their school. The results of the SLO Survey revealed that the faculty of this school perceived a high level of existence of the conditions of PLCs already in operation at the beginning of the District PLC initiative. The results of the survey also showed that the staff rated total PLC readiness score in the top quartile of the elementary schools of the District. Only two schools were rated higher in the conditions aligned with the dimension of “principal’s facilitative leadership” and “shared visions of improvement.” The staff rated the conditions of the dimensions of “collective creativity and learning” and “school conditions and capacities” as being in the top third of the District:

Speaker #1: Well, I feel they are in direct alignment with what our school have been believing for several years, so what I really have enjoyed seeing is maintaining the focus, defining the priorities, the vision and mission statement, all those things, the needs assessment, communicating the vision, all those major components of the district actions and strategies, we’ve been doing here at this school. So what is appreciated and also respected is that it’s now being done throughout the County.

Speaker #2: The shared personal practice and collective learning application, as has been brought out several times here, is already embedded into the school's culture. Meetings are conducted, student work is examined, student work is scored, data is collected by teachers, data is examined by teachers with visitation, and conclusions are drawn and instructional actions result. So, collective learning and applications, shared personal practice, [are evident in the faculty's approach to discussing the vocabulary strategies to improve student learning promoted by the District] Supportive conditions, this school already had supportive conditions. We have a number of people already in place to do the jobs necessary to be supportive... (MDES, June, 2004)

The comments of the ILT members revealed that from a conceptual perspective the team understood the vision of the PLC initiative and were working to achieve that goal:

As far as the whole ultimate culture from a visionary perspective, when we get to the point where teachers feel comfortable asking and answering their own questions, then I think we'll know that we're there. If, for example, they want to know, whether or not focusing on processes in mathematics is more beneficial to learning than focusing on content and they want to do some action research on some regional discussions of the literature on that topic or if they want to know if literature circles are more powerful than reciprocal teaching and because they want to know that, they are willing to do data collection and [engage in]discussion that enables them to find answers to those questions, that would be tremendously exciting. There are some inroads made in that direction and I think that there is certainly hope for that in the future. (MDES, June, 2004)

Upper Cross Roads Elementary School

At the time of the study the Upper Cross Roads Elementary School (UCRES), which is located in a more rural part of Suburban County, had 480 full-time equivalent students. Twenty-two per cent of the students were identified with documented disabilities and were receiving special education services. No unique county-wide special education programs were located at that school at the time of the study, which possibly explains the high level of students with disabilities. Only 3.4% of the students were eligible for free and reduced meal programs. At the time of the

study the racial composition of the student population was comprised of 97.5% White students, 0.6% African-American students, and 1.8% other Non-White students.

Sixty-three per cent of the teachers at the school had ten or more years of experience and 75% held an Advanced Professional Certificate. On the 2004 State achievement testing 91.9% of the students achieved the required proficiency levels of the *NCLB Act* in reading and 87.7% achieved proficiency in mathematics. This school had never been on the “needs improvement list.”

The ILT of Upper Cross Roads Elementary School described a year of learning as they experienced the actions taken by the District over the course of the implementation year of the initiative:

Speaker #1: We maintained [a focus on PLCs] all year and through the faculty meeting and the staff development days and I thought that really helped in supporting the reorganization, and the school begin to embrace what a Professional Learning Community was. Obviously there’s a lot more work to be done for that to become internalized and then to become kind of independent from that, but that was very important and helped us as we were trying to [provide] supportive and shared leadership. We were learning as we were doing, and I think if we had had multi foci...that would have been more difficult. It was difficult enough as it was to understand our roles.

Speaker #2: And I have to agree. One of the things I have heard [teachers ask] already is “what will we be doing next year?” because we still haven’t entirely moved out of that culture [of] maintaining a single focus. And [we need to] get it to the actual institutional phase, not just “let’s try it out, let’s do some vocabulary, what’s next?” I think we really have a commitment to making sure the teachers understand that professional learning communities are here and yes, we are focusing on vocabulary, we’re not just going to drop everything and put a new focus in, but we’re going to maintain the good pieces, the underlying piece being PLC. (UCRES, June, 2004)

In describing the evidence of PLCs in their school the ILT shared the following type of activities:

Speaker #1: One of the things that happened [reflecting the PLC dimension of collective learning and application of learning] at the school was that there

were some book study groups where teachers met, picked a book, ... because it came out of teacher identified needs and they identified the professional reading that they wanted, met frequently, had their discussions and talked about implementation [of changes in instruction]..

Speaker #2: And that was really teacher led, the reading specialist was the facilitator, so that was definitely evidence of a kind of separate PLC thing. In our County-wide discussions, [the CILT suggested that] there would be a time where maybe six different PLC's were operating simultaneously ...I think [the book study group] was an initial start...I think that's the only way to start something that's a fairly new practice for most folks and so they had success. [This success] became evident in evaluation conferences when that was discussed and [teachers] mentioned [the book study groups] in their professional development plans. [The study groups] really operated outside of the ILT...they were definitely a teacher led PLC. (UCRES, June, 2004)

The ILT members of UCRES reported reaching a level of “implementation,” which is consistent with their comments during the interviews regarding not reaching “institutionalization.”

Open Space Elementary School

At the time of the study, the Open Space Elementary School (OSES) had 589 full-time students who were comprised of 32.4% White students, 60.9% African-American students, and 6.6% other Non-White students. This school is one of the few predominately minority schools in the District. At the time of the study the school also had the highest level of poverty in the District, with 73% per cent of the students documented as eligible for free and reduced meals. Fifteen per cent of the students at the school received special education services. Only 9% of the teachers had ten or more years of experience at the time of the study, with 31.5% holding an Advanced Professional Certificate.

The Open Space Elementary School was on the federal needs improvement list at the time of the study. The school made AYP for the 2004 school year and was

hoping to do so again as a result of the 2005 testing. On the 2004 State academic testing that was to meet the federal testing requirements, 61.1% of the students met proficiency levels in reading and 64.2% met proficiency levels in mathematics.

When the faculty responded on the SLO survey only one of the 32 elementary schools was rated higher than OSES on the existence of the conditions of a learning organization. The faculty perceived the school to have the characteristics of a learning school. On the individual dimension ratings only four of the 32 schools rated higher in the existence of the conditions of “principal’s facilitative leadership” and “shared visions for improvement,” and only two schools were rated higher in the dimensions of “collective creativity and learning” and “school conditions and capacities.” There was a strong message of a solid base of readiness for the work the District would do in developing PLCs across all schools:

Speaker #1: I think the staff development which the County has provided has given significant emphasis to the values that we’re now holding strongly to, the Professional Learning Communities in terms of collaboration, reflection, being adaptable, working with each other to identify areas of need for student progress, so we’ve taken the time I think as we’ve worked with colleagues under the auspices of the Central Office Staff Development to discuss and talk about things that are now being stressed.

Speaker #2: I would add to the idea of shared personal practice that our teachers have worked with each other to observe each other teaching, to go through each other’s classrooms and take a look at the environment, take a look at the teacher practices.

Speaker #1 : And that’s going to continue too with teacher rounds when teachers are to collaboratively to plan that lesson and then each teach components of the lesson and observe one another, and so that too will really have a great impact on the process.(OSES, June, 2004).

The ILT members of OSES were clear in their descriptions of progress in meeting one of the more challenging areas of developing PLC conditions, shared personal

practice. In fact, this dimension area was perceived to be less present than other dimensions of PLCs by teachers in all schools in the District. Indeed, like other schools, teachers at OSES had reported that they did not commonly visit the classrooms of other teachers, and there were few practices in place in schools that decreased teacher autonomy and isolation.

It is evident from the school comments that high and low readiness schools exhibit those conditions for multiple reasons. The value of District's conducting formalized surveys on the existence of the conditions of PLCs and collective efficacy is apparent. The continued deeper analysis of how these conditions and school perceptions of themselves relate to student achievement is important to understand. Districts can respond differentially to schools that are or are not making progress if there is an understanding of what may be contributing to that progress perspective.

Other Findings

The broad scope of data and information collected in this study provided for additional opportunities of data analysis that go beyond the scope of the research questions of this dissertation. These are opportunities for additional research that will be considered at some future date. There are some themes that emerged as the data for this study were analyzed that relate to the role of school districts that have not yet been reported. These findings will be reported in this section of the report.

Role of the Superintendent

The Superintendent of Schools is the primary leader in any district. Superintendents act out their roles in districts in different ways depending on their

leadership style, the size of the district, their relationship with their Boards, and many other factors. In the Suburban District, my role as the superintendent was often defined as the “lead learner.” In addition to this role, I provided leadership in other areas related to fiscal, political, legal, and other issues. This study examined the actions of the Central Instructional Leadership Team, of which I was a member, to learn more about the actions districts take when implementing a systemic reform initiative. Although there was no specific District action that only involved the superintendent in this study, all District action decision-making involved the superintendent as a member of the CILT.

The data presented in Chapter 5 provide a summary of the actions taken by the District. In Chapter 6 the reaction of the school-based leadership and teachers has been presented. The more quantitative data do not illuminate the specific views of the school-based leaders on all topics. This was the case with the perceptions of school ILTs about the role of the superintendent in working with the schools on systemic improvement initiatives. The data from this study that best reveals the perception of staff about the actions of the superintendent are found in the transcripts of the structured interviews with the ten study school ILTs. The perspective gained from reviewing these data revealed that my role and how I played it within the context of the PLC initiative was important to the District staff.

Comments made during the structured interview sessions revealed that the involvement of the superintendent held an important value to members of the school-based ILTs. The following statement made by a member of a middle school ILT

revealed that importance, as well as revealing when the superintendent's performance did not meet the needs of the ILT:

I thought last year and, granted I was coming into a position where I wanted to be, but when I went to last year's Ed Leadership training in August, I thought that [the Superintendent] did an excellent job in sharing her enthusiasms, her passion and vision with everybody there. She was there the whole time, she sat in on, she and a facilitator sat in on all the sessions, she was there from the opening rah-rah to closure. This year at Ed Leadership training I felt that was missed. I kind of was expecting her to give a stronger initial talk to us about how far we've come; these are the things that we've done so well this year [She could say]. I'm hoping that you will do this, and this, this year, [to implement our PLC initiative]... that [she will] [But this year] the only real positive thing I got out of the training the last two days was the new framework for the new financial program. (HMS, June, 2004)

An ILT member from OSES shared her views on the positive feelings she had about my involvement in the leadership training:

It was good to see the Superintendent actually teaching, you know, just to see it and in terms of the teaching, reflecting on that teaching and interact. And she did it; at least it appeared, without thinking because some people may be thinking 'oh my goodness so the guru is teaching' so they expect no mistakes. But it was just a natural in terms of teaching and I think that's crucial, and the same thing here in this school. Because people are quick and especially for these specialists to speak really quick to think, well you're supposed to be the math magic person, you're supposed to know it all, now do it. But it's good for people to see, [a leader say] 'no I don't have all the answers, but I know how to ask the questions that can get to the answers' I think that is important. (OSES, June, 2004)

A comment from a member of the ILT from Upper Cross Roads also shared the view that having me involved with interactions with staff sent a positive message about our improvement initiative:

I think it's important to note, and we keep hearing this, that the emphasis is on the focus and trying to remain true to the focus and the allocation of supports in relation to that focus and making certain that it's ongoing, I think not just to be whistling' smoke toward the Superintendent, but the fact that every time she has an opportunity to have an audience with the leadership or when she has a chance to come walk through the building, the vision is kept in front of us by the fact that we're looking at being a learning group, that the emphasis

is on the improvement and that differentiation is a part of that improvement, and we're making some strides, and being very upbeat and positive about that. (UCRES, June, 2004)

The members of the MDES team described the importance that messages from the Superintendent regarding the District's initiatives have in reinforcing the commitment that the system had to continue the focus and maintain efforts:

And as I read through the pre-interview survey, one of the questions was related to [what we heard] from the CILT in support of the initiatives. As administrators/mentors/school based ILT's, we heard from the Superintendent, from [three CILT members mentioned here] what they were thinking, believing, feeling and what their vision was. The teachers I don't think had that opportunity to hear it. They heard [about the vision through the ILTs] ... This has been, in my opinion, a monumental change [in District] vision over [a short] time. I don't know quite honestly if the one e-mail we got from the Superintendent went out to everybody because I didn't ask teachers if they also got that communication, but I think it is an important piece. We can reiterate that, but maybe in some regard seeing or understanding this message from the Central Office would be powerful for teachers understanding that [PLCs are] not going to pass, it is not [a situation where they can assume that] 'this too shall pass.' [There is District] commitment, ... But sometimes there is a certain power to hearing it from the most important [leaders in the District] that they are believing it, living it, doing it, understanding it, and learning it as well. And it might be something that could be addressed in some way. (MDES, June, 2004)

During the structured interview facilitator's visits to two schools on the same day a member of two different ILTs made suggestions that the superintendent develop alternate means of interfacing with all the teachers across the District. The facilitator made the following note at the end of one of the interview tapes to highlight the interactions:

A really interesting thing happened. Both groups of instructional leadership teams today both mentioned that they think it valuable for the superintendent to do some sort of either live broadcast or that there be an ... for the Superintendent to speak to teachers and when we closed out, after we closed out the session, somebody, this last session, somebody brought up the live broadcast, so again, this is twice in one day, which I really see as kind of interesting and I just wanted to make that note. (Facilitator, July, 2004)

The desire that I interact with teachers directly was also reinforced by the following

ILT member's comment:

One of the things that used to happen in this County that I'm sort of sad to see gone is the back to school rally concept where everybody got to hear from the Superintendent. I find [the Superintendent] really to be inspirational and no matter how good we are at delivering messages, it's sort of sad that the folks who are really in front of the children don't get to see her in some of those times when there's a clear message. I mean she has such a clear vision of what she wants and our teachers don't get to see that. (June, 2004)

Each of these comments from different schools highlights that school-based ILT members are thinking about the interactions that they have personally had with me as the superintendent. These data, in the form of interview statements, revealed the importance of the role that I play as a District leader who helps define and communicate the vision of where we are going as a District. While other case studies identified as important the role of the superintendent in determining the actions and strategies for reform, they were silent on the important role played by the superintendent through interpersonal interactions conveying information, providing motivation, or increasing commitment to the initiative.

Roadmaps Desired

During the structured interviews ILTs were asked how the CILT might improve on the supports that were provided to the schools in developing PLCs. Discussions with school administrators often stressed the need to allow flexibility in how actions are taken at different school sites so that consideration could be given to the unique needs of each school. Many of the actions outlined in Appendix F revealed that modules or models were provided to school-based ILT members or

teams on the topics they needed to present to their staff or on processes and training that needed to be provided to their staff. The modules were of a single design and typically the CILT developed one single, integrated lesson plan for the professional development they provided to ILTs directly or at Educational Leadership Meetings. Analysis of responses to this question suggests that ILTs perceived that there was room for improvement in how the supports were provided in helping them train their staff. The following statement from an ILT member from a high school best communicates the message that several schools gave about CILT support:

I've been thinking maybe the CILT ... could give us two, three, four, or five different ways that [we] could use that so that we could choose a model or develop a model out of something that's been presented if we do have options within what they give us. (LHS, June, 2004)

Other ILT members from the same school gave a different message and requested that the CILT be more specific in the type of defined expectation or directions that were provided:

There remains still uncertainty, telling us about what we're supposed to do next year and I suspect that might be partly our responsibility for giving schools some flexibility. I think, well I'll speak for myself; I would prefer a little less flexibility and a little more direction. (LHS, June, 2004)

This type of message was repeated often throughout the interviews. The pattern of needing clear, consistent, frequent, and defined information to use with the faculties of their schools was something that many ILTs saw as an area that would improve the support that the CILT provided.

Summary Comments

Chapter 6 presented the data and findings that were gathered to investigate the perceptions of school-based staff, both teachers and administrators. The perceptions

of teachers were reflected in the results of the School as a Learning Organization (SLO) surveys. Comparisons were made between schools that had either low or high readiness for developing PLCs. The results of the surveys revealed that even schools that were rated as high PLC readiness schools had a wide variability in the pattern of demographics. Similarly, the schools that were low readiness for PLCs represented different demographic patterns of race, poverty, teacher experience, and achievement.

When reviewing the district actions that were implemented by the CILT, data were analyzed to determine school ILT perceptions of the extensiveness of use of each district action, and the perceived helpfulness of each District action. Comparisons were made between the perceptions of the CILT members and the perception of the ILT members on the extent of use and degree of helpfulness of each District action. There was a high degree of general agreement between the CILT and the ILTs on the helpfulness of five of the ten district actions; there was less agreement between the two groups on the extent of use of each of the district actions. A generally high agreement existed between the CILT and ILT's perception of District action use on only three of the actions.

Of importance in the end were the perceptions of the ILT members that nine of the ten District actions were supportive in helping the school leadership develop PLCs in their schools. Three of these District actions were perceived as helpful by the ILTs, but not the CILT. What would make the CILT take an action that they would later not see as helpful, and what caused the ILTs and CILT to differ in their perceptions that something was or was not helpful?

Certain actions that were considered helpful were not determined to be a high percentage of the District actions. One example of this type of action was “monitoring and oversight.” While this type of District action represented a low percentage of the total District actions, there was a high level of ILT interest in having the District engage in more monitoring and oversight. The ILTs indicated that they felt that the CILT needed to hold schools to a higher level of accountability, and that the attention that school-based staff received when in-person monitoring by the CILT occurred was viewed positively. While sharing personal practice was a PLC dimension that was not widely evident in any of the District’s case study schools as measured by the SLO Survey, the fact that the ILTs in those ten schools were urging the CILT to monitor and engage in on site accountability and oversight visits may be a promising indicator. Was the openness of the ILTs to visitation and observation a sign of a decrease in the autonomy of school leadership groups? Was the perceived increased openness to CILT observation an indicator that an element of shared personal practice was emerging? Could the shared personal practice experience of the ILTs later result in the same increased openness of teachers in sharing personal practice with each other?

Finally, the study explored the perceptions of ILTs about the degree of progress they had made in developing PLCs in their schools. The results indicated that schools with low levels of readiness were perceived by their ILTs as making different degrees of progress, ranging from a little, to early implementation level, to a high degree of progress, reaching late implementation or early institutionalization. Schools that began from a baseline of demonstrating a high level of readiness for

PLCs made different degrees of progress as well. Some high level PLC readiness schools reached late implementation or early institutionalization, while other high readiness schools only reached a level of early implementation. Districts cannot assume that schools that function at any range of baseline level will make similar levels of progress over the time period of the initiative. It is important that periodic status checks occur.

Reflecting on the findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 will support the development of key conclusions resulting from this study. Chapter 7 will discuss these findings and develop some conclusions and implications that detail the significance of this study.

Chapter 7 – Discussion, Conclusions and Implications

Overview

This case study focused on the action decisions taken by the superintendent and central leadership team of a mid-sized suburban school district. It examined the District's actions over a two-year period that spanned the work of the planning and preparation year and the first year of the implementation of the initiative. Building on the belief that a more collaborative district and school culture were essential to ultimately improve student achievement, the District sought to establish the conditions of professional learning communities across all schools.

Review of the Problem and Study

School systems across the United States are facing the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which mandates that all schools and districts meet a number of performance requirements addressing teacher quality, student achievement, and the quality of professional development provided to teachers. Of these requirements the student achievement aspects are both the most critical and the most challenging. Districts, which are now recognized as having a critical role in reform (Elmore, 1993, 2002; Foley, 2001; Fullan, 2003; Massell, 2000; Togneri & Anderson, 2003), must determine effective approaches to meeting these requirements.

The improvement work of districts and schools is embedded in multiple layers of federal, state, community, district, and school contexts. The interactions between these contexts have been shown to affect the culture of the school and district (Elmore, 1993; Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Districts must operate and plan within these

contexts to be effective in creating lasting change. Thus, districts are believed to be critical players and necessary partners in school improvement (Appelbaum, 2002; CPRE, 2000; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). The leadership actions of the district must address and mediate the interactions of these multiple contexts and provide for coherence and continued momentum in change across the school system.

Districts need to explore the multiple possible actions they can take to learn what helps schools change (Knapp et al., 2003b). This means that districts must become learning organizations that engage in action research to improve their practices as well as the practices of schools as they focus on instructional practice (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003). Districts need to implement actions that will promote and support the cultural changes required to create effective PLCs. Districts further need to understand how their actions mediate the environmental and contextual influences of social systems model and support the transformational processes that change the culture in which teaching and learning occur (Bolman & Deal, 2002, 2003; Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

To change the teaching and learning culture, districts' act within structural, cultural, political, and individual systems. Understanding how the actions of the district occur within these systems is essential. The central research questions guiding this study were:

What are the actions the Suburban District took to support school-based development of professional learning communities?

How did the actions the District took address the multiple systems of the adapted social system model?

How did the school-based Instructional Leadership Teams perceive the influence of district actions intended to support the development of PLCs at their school site?

To investigate how districts serve in this newly emerging leadership role, I conducted a single case study of the Suburban School District, a mid-sized district in Maryland. The District initiative under study implemented an array of District actions to promote the development of PLCs across all schools. This study involved secondary analysis of data gathered by the Suburban District Central Instructional Leadership Team as part of an action cycle of inquiry to improve District capacity to support the development of school-based PLCs. The data upon which I have conducted secondary analysis was gathered based on the sampling decisions of the District. As a result, in my secondary analysis I considered results of the Schools as Learning Organization survey that was administered in August 2003, prior to implementation activities by the CILT. The SLO survey was administered to faculty present in all of the schools at the time of administration, resulting in returns from 2,448 of the approximately 2,800 teachers in the District.

I also conducted secondary analysis on interview and survey data collected by the CILT at the end of the implementation year of the PLC initiative. A sample of ten of the District's 50 schools was used. One aspect of action cycle used by the Suburban District CILT involved the assessment of the perceptions the ILTs had on the helpfulness of the PLC initiative. The CILT used the schools' mean scores on the SLO survey administered at the beginning of the implementation year to categorize the ten schools as low or high in PLC readiness. Three were categorized as low

readiness schools and six as high readiness schools. The interviewed schools became the study schools for the CILT comparative analysis across District schools. This sample of ten schools also became the focus of my secondary analysis. In this secondary analysis I reexamined interview and survey responses of members of ILTs in the ten schools, and then examined other archival data from the District database to develop socio-demographic profiles of each school.

Other data gathered by the District were used in my secondary analysis. I conducted secondary analysis of the perceptions of the four CILT members on the helpfulness and extensiveness of District actions. As part of the action cycle, the four members of the CILT sought to determine differences between the perceptions of ILT members in the ten case study schools and their own assessments of the helpfulness and extensiveness of the actions taken by Suburban School District in creating school-based PLCs. The CILT members responded to the questions about the helpfulness and extensiveness of District action that they had asked members of the ILTs in the ten sampled schools.

After all primary data and documents were gathered, the QSR NVivo qualitative research software was used to analyze district action patterns and to gain insights into how these actions were perceived by members of these ILTs.

Overview of Chapter 7

This chapter will review the findings on the actions taken by the District and consider their relationship to the literature. Possible influences on these actions will be discussed. The effectiveness of the methodologies used in the study will also be discussed, considering possible weaknesses that might be addressed in future

research. The findings of the study will be examined in light of the literature on the role of districts in school change and the literature on PLCs. Conclusions drawn from the findings and implications for future district work and policy development will be reviewed. Finally, recommendations for future research will be presented.

Discussion and Interpretation of the Results

Problem and Assumptions

The Suburban District had a Comprehensive Professional Development Plan approved by the Board of Education and in place by 2002. However, it was not effectively moving forward job-embedded staff development at the school level. As superintendent, I was beginning to understand the more direct intentional role the District needed to play if the goal of improving teacher practice was to be achieved through this CPDP approach. If the District was to move forward with job-embedded professional development with an accompanying goal of becoming a learning organization, then the District needed to play a stronger central leadership role. The problem facing the District was how to begin to change to a culture of a learning organization. The superintendent and District leadership designed a reform strategy that involved initiating a change in district and school culture, thus defining a reform focus that was applicable to all teachers in the school system. The use of research-based information in the literature resulted in the District aligning the improvement focus with a well-documented promising strategy of developing the culture of PLCs across all schools in the District. The role that this District played in determining a systemic improvement strategy was aligned with the decision methods presented in many of the district reform case studies reported in the literature. Central leadership

staff, under the guidance of the superintendent, designed the change strategies that were implemented without input from school-based implementers.

The District took actions that would move the initiative to the school level. Determining what these actions were and the perceived reaction the actions received from school-based leadership was the central investigation in this study. Based on the literature, several assumptions made about the effects of district actions. One assumption was that the actions of the District would be consistent with those identified in the literature review of other district case studies. This assumption proved to be correct. There was evidence that PLCs were operating in the schools as a result of the actions taken by the District, and there was evidence that the actions of the District were of the type gleaned from the review of literature and presented in *Figure 5.2* (see Table 5.5). Thus, the assumption that District actions in the study would be similar to those found in case studies of other district change efforts was correct.

The District conducted a primary analysis of the data gathered from the School as a Learning Organization Survey (SLO) as part of regular District's work. Findings from that survey revealed that the teachers reported a range of perceptions of the existence of the conditions of a learning organization in their schools. Teachers in some schools reported that there were few of the conditions present that were needed to begin to function like a PLC, while teachers in other schools reported that there were many of the desired conditions for PLCs already present in their schools. In order to further analyze the effects of District actions, the CILT further analyzed SLO survey data, categorizing the total school scores as low or high

readiness for developing PLCs. A total of ten low and high PLC readiness schools were identified and the CILT surveyed members of the ILTs in those schools concerning their perceptions of the helpfulness and extensiveness of District actions, and their assessments of the extent of the school's implementation of PLCs at the end of the implementation year. District facilitators then conducted focused interviews with ILT teams to learn more about the challenges that they faced in implementing District actions and their progress towards becoming PLCs. The CILT studied transcripts and survey responses in order to refine and further develop the strategies that would be taken in the third year of implementation of the initiative.

In this study, I undertook secondary analyses of these data from the ten case studies conducted by the CILT as part of the District's ongoing action research to support the development of school-based PLCs. In the secondary analysis, based on the initial PLC readiness ratings of these schools, I assumed that ILTs in low and high PLC readiness schools would respond differentially to the actions of the District, with some being perceived positively and others not viewed as supportive. More specifically, I assumed that schools with a higher PLC readiness level, as measured by the SLO survey, would perceive the District's actions as more helpful and thus be able to make greater progress in developing PLCs in their schools. I further assumed that schools with low levels of PLC readiness would struggle to make sense of the District's actions and find it more difficult to make progress in developing PLCs. The findings did not support the assumption that high or low readiness school progress toward developing PLCs in their respective schools could be predicted by their readiness levels.

My assumption that the progress that would be made by low and high readiness schools could be projected based on their readiness for PLCs was similar to a point reported about the New York District #2 case report (Elmore & Burney, 1997). The results of District #2 instructional improvements were reported as inconsistent across schools. The inconsistent progress noted in high and low readiness schools in the development of PLCs was also evident. The structured interview data in this dissertation provides some possible reasons for the inconsistency that was not explained in the District #2 case study (Elmore & Burney, 1997). In the Suburban District, school ILT members made comments during the interviews suggesting that the attention and effort of the school ILT in leading the PLC reform effort took a secondary place to some other change initiative(s) being implemented in the school. For example, at LHS a technology initiative was being implemented that was important to the staff. Therefore, the ILT indicated that they had not done as much to gain understanding of requirements for creating PLCs as they might have because of that technology initiative. Other schools appeared to have a deep understanding of the true vision of functioning PLCs. This may result in the ILTs at those schools being more discriminating in their assessed perceptions of the progress their schools made in developing PLCs.

These findings suggest that schools are much like individuals and have their own learning rates and learning styles. This offers one plausible explanation for why schools perceive the extent of use and the helpfulness of District actions in varied ways. It may also offer one explanation as to why schools perceive differently the progress they made. The depth of conceptual understanding that individual schools

and individual ILT members have of PLCs could impact how they perceive the status of their school's growth and organizational conditions of collaboration.

Although 80% of the District actions were perceived by the ILTs as generally helpful, there were differences in the individual perceptions of the ILT team members within a school. Perceptions of members of the ten ILTs were generally divided across three different ratings for the degree of helpfulness of the ten district actions. There were differences in the CILT perception of helpfulness in three of the district actions when compared to the perceptions of the ILTs. Specifically, these were defining vision and values, communicating vision messages, and defining roles and responsibilities of staff or staff groups.

The assumption that some district actions would relate to the systems of the social systems model for schools and districts was supported by the findings (see Table 5.3). District actions were spread across all of the systems of the social systems model (see *Figure 5.3*) of transformation. A different proportion of the District's efforts were required to attend to the issues of importance in each of the four systems of the model.

During the structured interviews, there were a number of comments made about the value of the superintendent being an active participant in the training and regularly communicating the vision messages. These were not anticipated from my review of literature on district roles in education reform. While the literature discussed the decision role of the superintendent, there was no discussion of the affective or teaching aspects of the superintendent's interactions with staff. Views of actions taken by the superintendent specifically as reported in the literature were

mixed. The case studies reviewed provided descriptions of the directives, strategies, and requirements set forth by the superintendents; however, a description of the interactions and relationships between the superintendents and school leadership is not provided. One explanation for the lack of opportunity to gain that insight would be that the case studies in the literature are typically descriptive and not explanatory. The brief time spent on site visits and the short interviews conducted by the research teams in some reported case studies did not allow for the kind of in depth descriptions provided in this study through analysis of the perceptions of the implementers of change. Understanding any differences that might exist between a superintendent promoted from within the district versus one brought in from outside the district may be helpful in supporting superintendent reflection.

The data analyzed in this study informed the central research questions posed in this dissertation. The District actions gleaned from the case studies in the literature were used by the Suburban District leaders. Using a criteria of 75% positive ratings, school ILT members perceived 70% of these actions as providing some level of helpfulness in implementing school-based PLCs (Table 6.1). The comments from the structured interviews aided the researcher in understanding why each action was perceived in the manner it was. The importance of mapping the District actions back to the adapted social systems model (Hoy & Miskel, 2005) aligns with the need for the District leadership to understand why the actions may have been helpful to the school ILTs. While the study categorized the actions according to my perceptions of the fit within the model, either the structural system, the political system, the cultural or individual system of the model, the model was not presented to the ILT members.

Despite that fact, the study provided insights into the thinking of the ILT members of some schools. For example, the principal of one school indicated in his comments that a specific requirement defined by the superintendent enabled him to do something that he had wanted to do for some time. This suggested that there had been some political barrier or issue that was overcome when the superintendent directed that something should occur.

Another example of actions taken by the District leadership that can be viewed from the perspective of the implementers within the social systems model was the reassignment of personnel to the positions of Instructional Facilitators (IF). Despite the efforts of the CILT members to be sensitive to their needs, the reassigned central office staff experienced the greatest change in roles and had the most concerns about the change. Using the social systems model for analysis, these concerns were reflected in the decreased motivation of the reassigned staff in their new positions. The comments in the interviews indicated that the ILT members at some schools felt fortunate to have an IF wanting to do that job, as opposed to those perceived to have been dragged “kicking and screaming into the position.” This revealed the *individual system* and *political system* issues that arose from the District’s decision to use existing resources for the initiative. Had the resources been available to create these positions with new staff, the individual system issues might have been decreased. The political system issues may have been greater because of using new resources in ways that increased the administrative staff rather than providing what others would view as more support directly to students. Thus, using a heuristic such as the open systems model supports interpretations of data allowing the researcher to take into

account multiple perspectives and multiple time periods, all influencing the perspectives that stakeholders may take.

Contributions of the Study to Understanding District Based Action Research

Effectiveness of the Action Research Methodology

The action cycle used by the Suburban School District began, when in my role as superintendent, I undertook a review of case studies on reform efforts of various school districts. Most of these case studies described district actions at single points in time and in relatively descriptive terms. The case studies did suggest actions that a district should consider when undertaking a systemic change, such as the PLC initiative, however, they did not provide details about changes that might occur over time. Nor did they show how districts seeking to engage in action research might go about engaging in ongoing research to track the effects of changes, and to make modifications in actions to address unwanted effects, and then to again track changes of the new actions. Not finding models for such district action research in case studies of district reform reported in current literature, I drew from theories of action inquiry cycles, and from the work of change theorists to establish the directions that Suburban School District CILT would take in conducting ongoing action research.

A central feature of such action research is finding ways to gather information on the effects of an action. In applying best practices in action research to the design of the Suburban School District action research cycle, I therefore sought the guidance of members of the CILT and the members of the District's research office. The result of discussions among these district leaders was the development of several strategies

for data gathering and the identification of appropriate instruments to assess the impact of the District's PLC initiative. Instruments used in the action research undertaken by District leaders were designed to gather perceptions of implementers. This form of data was appropriate for the purposes of action research that enables the CILT to take periodic pictures of how people are interpreting what is going on. Reform activities by Districts, such as the PLC initiative, require that the CILT continually assess the perceptions of the ILTs and teachers. District leadership must know if the implementers are unclear about the actions being taken, and adjust their actions and responses to the needs of the schools. The action cycle in districts seeking to become learning organizations involves District leadership assessing the perceptions of the implementers, and taking actions that address the needs of the school-based administrators and teachers. Actions must be directed to ensure that there are multiple ways to help implementers connect what the district is doing to their prior knowledge so they can build on that knowledge. Change is slow and difficult. District leadership must keep this in mind as they continually cycle through the *assess – act – adjust* cycle.

In this study, I described the approach that the Suburban District took in conducting ongoing research to assess the effectiveness of its actions to support the creation of school-based PLCs. In order to be able to show that a district is engaged in true evaluative action research, districts have to do baseline data and then track that data over the initial period of district initiatives. It is important that trend data be gathered and analyzed over time and over subsequent stages of the District's initiative. This includes changes to the internal and external environmental

conditions that influence the desired transformational processes the district seeks to generate in schools. The trend data will provide more robust data to inform district thinking and planning.

It is important for districts to use data from multiple aspects of an action taken as part of a reform initiative. As the ongoing discussion, reflection, and adaptation occurs, districts doing true action research will decide that other types of data beyond surveys are needed or that data that were used for one purpose is discovered to be useful in other ways. One example evident in the findings of this study was the use that the CILT of Suburban School District made of observation data that were collected at District schools. The CILT's analysis of the observation data resulted in a new direction for the team's work with school administrators on the approaches that should be taken for observing teachers. If these data had not been collected, reviewed, and discussed by the CILT members, the power of the use of these data would have been missed. The trend data over the course of the implementation year revealed that improvements were made in the number and scope of observations. In addition, the data provided clear direction for an area of training needed by school-based administrators in how to best write effective observation reports.

The approach to research taken by the Suburban School District also provides a model for more credible inquiry and substantiated support for mapping directions to support and sustain school improvement. This is an important contribution of the study to the small body of scholarship on the design, implementation and effects of school District reforms. The action research approach taken by the district suggests ways in which ongoing research can provide important insights into trends over time.

Such analysis provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of change than can be obtained through single case studies of district reform effects on schools that focus on single points of time in a change process.

Contributions of Findings To Research and Literature

Contribution of Findings to Literature on Collaborative Learning

The literature on organizational learning connects the learning of three distinct entities – the district or system, teachers, and students (Knapp et al., 2003b). The literature stressed that the learning of each of these groups shapes and affects the learning of others. The district has leverage to create environments that build a collective will to learn together about effective practices that will best support student achievement (Elmore, 2002; Knapp et al., 2003b; Massell, 2000). A district that is engaged in learning about its own operations and is committed to engaging in constructive influences is more likely to itself become a learning community. McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) described three elements that relate to and yield the conditions desired in learning communities; (a) systems approach to reform, (b) existence of a learning community in the central office, and (c) an approach of supporting professional learning focused on instructional improvement.

The PLC emerges in a workplace that maintains support of teachers in their learning about classroom practices, and that enhances their greater commitment to the effectiveness of their instructional practice (Hall & Hord, 2001). Darling-Hammond (1996) and McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) suggested that districts must create the kind of professional environments that nurture collaborative efforts among school

faculty as one of the best ways to impact teacher practice and ultimately student learning.

Hoy and Miskel (2005) wrote of the challenges of trying to change the culture of schools and districts. In the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, six districts integrated some aspect of small learning communities into their reform strategies (Applebaum, 2002; Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, 2003; Foley, 2001; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Togneri & Lazarus, 2003). While these districts had elements of small learning communities for students, only Superintendent Alvarado in San Diego (Darling-Hammond et al. 2002) established Learning Community Groupings for principals. Superintendent Costella, Kent County, Maryland, implemented a learning structure emphasizing the Baldrige Framework of continuous improvement. This framework utilized a self-study approach to defining the needs of the district.

While special learning groups were spontaneously formed by principals in the Suburban District, the CILT's PLC initiative sought to initiate the establishment of a PLC culture as the standard operating procedure for all district schools and business environments. This was not an approach reported in the literature on reform strategies. It required an approach to system wide change that focused on addressing the issues in structural, political, individual, and cultural systems impacted by the initiative in such a way that the sought after transformational processes occurred. This required that District actions, such as monitoring and oversight, be appropriately targeted and understood by school faculty. The District must engage in ongoing action research, and make appropriate changes as a result of that action research. In

the case of Suburban District's PLC initiative, such changes were made when the CILT learned from the school-based teams that there was a need to monitor and observe the operation of the ILTs and PLCs at the school level. This process was included in the CILT work plan for the following year.

Actions such as those taken in this example are required to accomplish the desired cultural change. They begin with the creation of structures that support the needed processes. Districts have been reported to utilize structural changes to create change without attending to the individual needs of those involved in the change (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). The actions of the Suburban District addressed both structural and individual system needs. Individual needs were addressed through the training sessions provided in multiple venues to different employee groups. While the District addressed the individual needs of most groups, the CILT ignored the individual needs of the assistant principals. This was an error that created tensions with that group. Failing to include the APs was short-sighted in ignoring the need to develop the future leaders of the District by giving them the same training that other groups received.

Contribution of Findings to Literature on District Reform

There is some consistency in the elements that are evident in the literature and case study research on district reform. All cases reviewed emphasized the need to communicate high expectations for students. These same case studies utilized professional development as the main strategy for change (Applebaum, 2002; Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002, 2003; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Foley, 2001; Togneri & Lazarus, 2003). Four of the districts focused

their improvement efforts on literacy, leaving unanswered questions about how standards were communicated for other critical core subjects (Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Foley, 2001). The leadership of these districts believed that if students could improve their literacy skills, then achievement in other areas of the curriculum would also improve. Corcoran and Christman (2002) reported that the focus on curriculum standards and literacy were only effective if the district provided time and collaboration needed to fully understand the curriculum standards.

The CILT of the District identified the focus of the reform initiative as a professional development and cultural process change to create PLCs rather than focusing on a content subject, such as reading or mathematics. The District leaders developed a structure that utilized the school-based instructional facilitators and mentors as secondary change agents to principals and APs in supporting teachers through job-embedded coaching and modeling. This approach had not been taken by districts reported in the case study literature, yet it was consistent with a growing body of literature on the promise of PLCs to improve classroom practice (Boyd, 1992; Boyd & Hord, 1994; DuFour & Eaker, 1992, 1998; Fullan, 2001; Hall & Hord, 2001; Hord, 2000, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003). At the time of this study, there was little research on district-wide initiatives to implement PLCs in all schools

Contribution of Case Study Findings to the Literature on District Actions

The specific types of actions taken by districts in reform initiatives actions can only be inferred from the literature reporting on case study research. Often the specific actions taken by districts were unclear due to the lack of specific information

about the steps taken with schools or staff groups during the district implementation plans. This study found that districts can initiate actions that influence the development of attributes of PLCs in schools across the district. The focus of the Suburban District initiative was consistent with the belief that school systems can influence the creation of the desired conditions. McLaughlin and Talbert (2003) argued against three myths that others believe exist with regard to strong district leadership that would prevent districts from being successful in their efforts. These myths include: (a) resistance from principals and teachers to district leadership; (b) staff turnover, causing lost ground in the change; and (c) local politics. Instead, McLaughlin and Talbert believed that district leadership is accepted if a strong framework and involvement support the district's efforts. They further believed that if the superintendent has a consistent, focused agenda that is supported by the Board of Education over time, the leadership of the district can navigate political challenges.

The actions taken by the Suburban District demonstrate that districts can create focus on a few aspects of change and develop school commitment to that change by supporting it with consistent messages. The reallocation or reassignment of staff from central office to the schools to take on new the roles as the IFs and teacher mentors sent clear messages to everyone in the Suburban District that supporting the schools was more important than centralizing efforts in offices away from schools. The District CILT outlined the roles and responsibilities of reassigned staff to specify that they were to spend their time in direct instructional leadership activities and not drift to tasks involved in the day-to-day management of the school. The training provided by the external consultant on best instructional practices to

principals, instructional facilitators and mentors was intended to increase the comfort level of school-based ILT members in guiding discussions on improved instructional practice, and to increase their confidence and capacity to model lessons that incorporated these instructional practices. Developing skills in critical dialogue and observation helped focus administrative teams on instructional practices. The District action framework included actions reported in case studies of other districts efforts to create system-wide change. One of the widely reported actions, defining priorities and maintaining focus, was identified as important and viewed by members of the ILTs as a helpful action that the CILT understood often.

Analysis of the perceptions of ILTs in the ten sample schools examined in this study suggests that the cultural shift sought by the CILT in the Suburban District PLC initiative was underway. The actions taken by the CILT built on initial support for a new direction for the District that the superintendent had been able to gain from the Board of Education, the teachers union, and the building principals. Prior to undertaking any actions, the superintendent had convened a workgroup to define how the District should be organized to support teachers. This workgroup was organized to ensure that there was some input from all levels of the District and the community. The actions of the District focused on the conditions of PLCs and used external consultants, who matched their presentations and printed materials to focus on PLCs and collaboration.

Building trust and relationships is essential to create the culture of a learning organization (Boyd & Hord, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1996). In this study, there was evidence of strengthened collegial relationships and increased trust among

members of the CILT and the superintendent. Administrative staff, including the CILT and the ILTs, had greater involvement with each other and with the superintendent. These are all indicators of an environment that is conducive to change (Boyd & Hord, 1994).

Hall and Hord (2001) stressed that the collaborative efforts needed to alter the conditions of the workplace culture for teachers are important. These conditions also need to be applied to the workplace culture of administrators. The presence of such workplace conditions was evident in the positive response and appreciation expressed in the comments of the ILT members about the risks taken by the superintendent, an assistant superintendent (curriculum and instruction), and other members of the CILT. It would be anticipated that the collegial relationships that increase the comfort of the school-based administrators in their contacts with the superintendent and CILT members would provide a model for how those administrators went about developing collegial relationships with their own ILT and teachers.

Research on district strategies to support school change reported many positive effects from increased collaboration among the staff. Several reported cases utilized strategies to develop collaboration between and among teachers through initiatives to create classroom labs, encourage interschool visitations, develop peer networks, and, in one case, to create small student learning communities (Applebaum, 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1997). The Suburban District took similar actions by structuring specified PLC time during staff development days to provide the supportive conditions needed for PLCs to function. The District had eight staff development days that had historically been used for district-wide staff development.

In order to facilitate the development of school-based collegial relations, the CILT allowed four of those days to be used as school-based professional development opportunities, and to allow the schools to structure professional development on skills and processes needed to become successful PLCs.

The schools in the Suburban District made different levels of progress in becoming more collaborative workplaces. The comments of ILT members during interviews suggested different reasons for the progress made in the desired culture change.

The ILT perceptions that the actions of the District were generally helpful was a positive finding that might not have been predicted based on the conclusions from other studies of the effects of district reform activity. In the case studies reviewed, several superintendents were reported to have felt the need to select the principals for their schools based on demonstrated aptitudes rather than inheriting principals that were promoted by previous superintendents (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Foley, 2001). The superintendents in the case studies reported that they met with greater success when they selected their own leadership. These leaders then demonstrated skills desired by the superintendent and demonstrated loyalty to the district effort.

No principals were replaced in the Suburban District in order to implement the reform initiative. The fact that I was the superintendent for a period of years potentially influenced the transitional process into the reform initiative. However, the difficulties experienced by some of the reassigned staff, as reflected in the comments of the ILTs during structured interviews, suggested that a similar resistance occurs in different ways and for different reasons in change initiatives.

In several case studies of district reform activities reviewed, there was also resistance to the district actions due to perceptions that the district initiative was too directive, too fast-paced, and because there were concerns on the part of administrators and teachers that they were held accountable before the appropriate capacity was built (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Foley, 2001). In the findings reported in this study of the Suburban District, there were also perceptions that some aspects of the initiative were not done in a timely enough manner to alleviate the concerns of some ILT members. An example of this was the District actions related to defining roles and responsibilities. ILT perceptions of role confusion were consistent with the reports in the literature that indicated that sometimes initiatives are implemented before capacity is developed (Corcoran & Christman, 2002; Foley, 2001). In the Suburban School District, ILTs perceived their capacity to implement the PLC initiative to have been diminished because revised roles and relationships with reassigned staff were not fully or widely understood. This school-based ILT perspective was in contrast to the true amount of time spent working to communicate role and responsibility expectations (see Table 5.5).

Contributions of the Case Study to Understanding the Utility of the Open Systems Model

In many case studies reviewed, District leaders reported the need to justify the focus and expense of the initiative to the Board of Education and elected officials (Elmore & Burney, 1997; Foley 2001). This type of District action was predictable based on the view of schools and districts as open systems that must respond to internal and external elements. Districts struggled with the same issues about

adequate fiscal resources. With inadequate resources some of the districts were reported to have failed in achieving the goals of the reform. Despite the lack of fiscal resources in this study, the Suburban District initiative moved forward and met with initial support from the schools, in part because the environmental context of the District was considered in developing supports for the initiative.

Noting the pressures of the *NCLB Act*, school systems now more than ever must mediate and make sense of the state and federal mandates. They face the responsibility of addressing the demands of all systems of the social systems model (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). There was evidence of actions taken by districts in all four of the systems of the social systems model. There were reports of the importance of District actions of a structural, cultural, political or individual nature (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). Although in these studies there were no reports of the extensiveness of the effort of districts in each of these systems, there are clear messages about the importance of some system issues in the overall success of the reform initiative.

Foley (2001) reported that the ultimate demise of the Philadelphia reform initiative was based on the lack of fiscal resources and the “do it all at once” approach. The issue of fiscal resources is both political and structural. This is one example from the literature of the issues to which districts must respond that relate to the social systems model utilized as a model of analysis for this study. Districts have challenges and opportunities in each of these areas and must make critical choices. If action choices ignore the demands of the various systems, then barriers may arise from the unresolved issues.

The Suburban District invested energy in implementing actions to address all of the four systems. This type of intentional activity requires that districts engage in ongoing analysis of effects actions as the initiative progresses over time. This approach provides insights for districts seeking to use the social systems model to guide analysis of actions and decisions and to provide data for refinement of the district initiative.

Conclusions

This study has shown that there are an array of actions that a district can take in developing and implementing a reform initiative. These actions are different in each district reform, yet there is some consistency to the type of actions taken by many districts. The school district in this study engaged in actions that addressed structural needs, political needs, cultural needs, and individual needs within the reform strategies. While differences of opinion existed, there was a general consensus that the Suburban District leadership team engaged in some district actions that were perceived by schools as being helpful and supportive of their efforts to create PLCs.

Perceptions Are Important

What we know about change is that what districts do matter, and that the actions districts utilize during their work with change and reform must be based on some conceptual framework or model of analysis. As the work is done at the grass roots level, what is important is whether those who must implement change can make sense of the actions taken by the leadership. We know that things do not always go as

planned and that the degree of implementation at the site of the work is critical to the overall impact of the intended action taken by leadership. In most cases, it is the actual implementers that determine whether an action or intention makes sense and gets implemented. For this reason, in this study I intentionally sought to understand the perceptions of teachers and of members of school ILTs.

I examined the impact of District action from the point of view of the implementers, in this case the principals, assistant principals, instructional facilitators, and the teacher mentors. The perceptions of these implementers reflected their understanding of the leadership actions and strategies taken by the District, thus influencing the actual implementation of the innovation. An analysis was made how the CILT, ILTs, and teachers perceived what was occurring with the work of the initiative and the actions of the District. Sometimes there were differences between what people perceived and what was actually occurring. These differences were evident when comparisons were made of ILT member responses to survey questions and in the review I conducted of artifacts of District activities. In many cases there were differences in the statements of implementers about whether an action had occurred and the memories of the reporters. The concerns and fears of those involved in the change influenced how they perceive events. It is likely that if their needs are met or if they have comfortable processes to mediate their feelings, the perceptions they have will more closely mirror the real events. Concerns, either expressed or not expressed, that may be influencing the reactions of the implementers must be considered as part of the data to be examined, as well as part of a districts action research to support change initiatives. By checking perceptions over time districts

can track whether the perceptions of the leaders and the perceptions of implementers converge.

District leadership must care about the perceptions of how things are going in the implementation of the reform. The feedback they get must be received regularly and allow for refinements of the actions and plans within the initiative. Districts must take baseline assessments of perceptions prior to implementation of an initiative and then continue to explore to see if the perceptions of the teachers and leaders have altered and how any changes have influenced the actual way they perform in their daily practice. The surveys conducted by the Suburban District in June and August of 2003, using the Stages of Concern Questionnaire, the SLO Survey, and the items on collective efficacy should be administered again in the future to see if there are results that demonstrate progress toward achieving the culture changes sought through the actions of the initiative.

An example of the type of ongoing research that districts should conduct is the comparison that the Suburban School District undertook at the end of the planning year to check to see if there was a relationship between teachers' collective efficacy beliefs and their perceptions of conditions of the PLC dimensions in their schools (Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas, 2005). The District wanted to know the relationship between student achievement levels in schools, the teachers' perceptions of the existing conditions of professional learning in their schools, and their perceptions of collective efficacy in their schools. In this study, it was determined that teacher perceptions of collective efficacy were related to the level of the school, with elementary teachers perceiving higher collective efficacy and higher levels of the

existence of positive school cultures for PLCs than were perceived by middle and high school teachers. Teachers' perceptions of collective efficacy and their perceptions of the existence of the conditions of PLCs are related in moderate to substantial ways. "This suggests that teachers who perceive their school to be characterized by shared leadership, focused vision, collaborative work, shared observations, and supportive conditions also perceive their colleagues (in that school) as effective in bringing about student learning" (Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas 2005 p. 26). A relationship was also found between reading score proficiency and collective efficacy. This would suggest that the collective efficacy beliefs of teachers are important in predicting the achievement of students and the existence of PLCs, which are promising in creating a school climate where student learning occurs. If this were not the case then why would a district invest substantial resources in the development of PLCs?

If the demands of *NCLB* are creating the conditions that cause schools and their faculties to seriously examine their practices, then the processes of PLCs and the perceptions of teachers about their existence may be the combination that allows serious study of classroom practices by teachers. Their perceptions of the desired workplace conditions may create the climate for that to occur. Perceptions of collective efficacy and other workplace factors are powerful because it's only how people perceive the culture that matters and that is what influences their behaviors and decisions for how they do their work.

Districts In Self-Study

Districts must become serious about their self-study through the implementation of action research procedures. School districts that seek to implement and sustain transformational processes in the design of efforts to improve student achievement must take seriously their responsibilities to assess the progress and status of the implementation and impact of their reform initiatives. The Suburban District took many actions that demonstrated the efforts it made to engage in self-study. While new to this process, the refinements to the District initiative were recognized and appreciated by the key school-based leaders and contributed to the ongoing positive attitudes of the implementers of change at the school level. Without the ongoing feedback loops built into the District leadership work plan, the adaptations made would not have addressed the concerns and issues that needed to be expressed. With practice, districts would learn to look at data in continued, different, varied, and deeper ways.

There are lessons learned through the action research experience. District leadership must continue to observe the impact of their actions through multiple means. The information gained through this process guided the planning of the distribution and skill of leadership through different groups in the district. The process of self-study provides opportunities to build on the base of skills possessed by the leadership and teachers by assessing that base and planning training that builds for growth. Districts will get variation in the data they gather. Without an action research model the data and opportunities to seek clarification of the variable data

would not occur. This leads districts to miss chances to identify challenges and opportunities.

The Suburban District also learned through the self-study in which they engaged. The feedback provided from IFs revealed a few of the struggles and challenges some of them were facing in adjusting to their new positions. Further investigation of these challenges was occurring at the time this study concluded. The issues that arose about assistant principals not receiving training directly from members of the CILT were revealed through the data gathered in surveys and the structured interviews. Adjustments to the implementation work plan were made to acknowledge that the *trainer of trainers* model was not effective and that direct contact with the CILT for training was important to the APs.

Districts want to sustain their reform efforts over time. What does sustainability really mean? Sustaining efforts over time relates to the district's ability to know what actions to take that continue to move the efforts of the workers forward. The needs of different groups of implementers were different in this study. The ability of the District to sustain the initiative and continue to influence a culture change requires that the needs and concerns of different groups be met. Without the self-study action research occurring, the desire to sustain will not occur.

Trust, Openness, and Transparency

District leadership gained respect from the key school leadership through their willingness to model and take risks in front of the leadership staff. This perception and appreciation was revealed through the comments made during the structured interviews. Recognition was given to the competencies of one member of the CILT

for his extreme talents as a facilitator of discussions and for his skill in coaching someone's personal thinking. Spontaneous recognition was given to another member of the CILT for quality of the professional development experiences she gave to the IFs and mentors who met 22 times as their own PLC, trying to improve their practice as on-site coaches, models, and mentors.

The role of the superintendent, highlighted earlier as an unexpected finding, was better understood in its relationship to the work and interaction patterns of the reform implementers. The superintendent's efforts to be involved in planning, to assume some of the hard work of leading professional development, to speak regularly on content material, to engage in vision clarification and vision messages, and in other leadership processes were found to be important to the success of the initiation. The commitment from the ILT members and teachers was increased through the involvement of the superintendent, and school ILTs wanted more contact with the District leadership. This was unexpected by members of the CILT, who had provided time for the ILTs and teachers to practice the new skills before they (the CILT) began extensive on-site visits and began providing feedback to the school ILTs.

The gains made in trust and confidence in the District leadership may be what breaks down the traditional walls of secrecy that we refer to as autonomy. Comments made during the structured interviews revealed that the ILTs wanted the CILT members to visit more often and provide feedback on what and how they were doing. Whether looking for praise or looking for guidance, the trust inherent in these requests reinforces the need for the leadership of the district to stay continually

engaged in the direct work of the reform and in the oversight of the application of that learning to the school sites.

Given the perceived power of the influence of the positive relationships and guidance, districts stand to gain by raising the expectations and building on the modeling and interaction power that has been established. Broad understanding of and belief in the power of transparency in modeling the action research process, and in developing the capacity for ongoing research at the district and school levels is the ultimate cultural change desired. Getting that process into the schools will best be accomplished by building on the relationships and structures of the supportive conditions and collective learning and application of that learning that have been established between District leadership and school-based leadership.

District Intentionality Critical

This study goes beyond previous literature in that it makes transparent the intense intentional level of planning and district action that was needed by one suburban district during the first two years of its reform initiative. This is important because it suggests that if districts are going to play the key leadership role that is now necessary, then the same level of intense work must be evident from district leadership and must be transparent to school-based leaders.

The level of activity documented in the summary of District actions (Appendix F) provides a look at only some of the actions that could be documented through artifacts. The reality is that many more actions and interactions occurred that were not a part of the archival records. While this may pose some limitations to the full perspective of District actions, the artifacts that were analyzed document the

scope of District actions, and the intensity and pervasiveness of the activity model across political, structural, cultural, and individual systems (*see Figure 5.3*)

It took the District leadership a full school year to plan and prepare for the initiative, thus allowing various subsystem issues to be addressed. The planning work continued throughout the first implementation year, as evidence in the artifact documents such as the CILT work plan, planning meeting agendas and documents, CILT review of data and initiative refinement, and the mid-year report to all school ILT members. The CILT members scheduled, planned the agenda, and held regular meetings to verify observations and formal data gathered within the initiative actions. The intentionality of these efforts stressed that the work of District leadership needs to be as intense and ongoing as that which is expected and needed at the school level. The artifacts demonstrated the intentionality of the reflective decision-making followed by the CILT members during the retreats and regular meetings. The need for districts to intentionally reflect on their actions and regularly adapt to better meet the needs of the ILTs and teachers is evident. Through these actions members of the CILT made their intentional efforts transparent models to be used by the ILTs in adopting similar processes with their schools and staffs. School-based leaders seeking to improve instructional capacity to increase student learning sought guidance from the District leadership. Members of the ILTs expressed their appreciation of the engagement of key District or school-based leaders in supporting and guiding their efforts to create PLCs. It is evident from this case study that the decision-making processes used by district leaders engaged in systemic reform must be transparent to school leaders. District leaders can provide guidance and support to school

leadership teams in creating PLCs. Given the need for these reflective and adaptive processes, what is the value of the adapted social systems model used for analysis in this study? There was utility for the Suburban District in the use of the social systems model for analysis of issues facing schools and the district as they were going through the initiation of the transformational process to become PLCs. The District did not operate in isolation of a huge complex contextual environment. Therefore, to be able to sustain the initiative the District had to be analytical about what was going on in the environments, both external and internal. This study suggests that a model such as the social systems model could allow the leadership of a district to determine the most promising actions for sustaining the work that is to be done. This kind of self-study approach, in a more in-depth way than a data audit, requires that leaders examine the impact of changes across the systems and their environments. Application of analytic models, such as the social systems model, is helpful in identifying the action research needs of districts, and useful in guiding the intentional self-analysis of the work that must be done by the district leadership and schools.

Implications

Implications for the Suburban District Practice

The study sheds light on how districts should use the results of their own self-study. Implications are present for the Suburban District as it continues its work on the development of conditions of PLCs. These implications should guide the extension of the work being done by the CILT. The structure of a CILT was recognized as essential in the eyes of the implementers. Comments during the structured interviews suggested that the actions taken by individuals named by them

were supportive of and encouraging to their school-based efforts. The interactions and relationships that developed created a climate in which the school-based ILTs urged the CILT members to come visit their schools and engage in on-site coaching and celebrations of success. These actions should be incorporated into District work plans.

The Suburban District has in its database considerable data that could be used in the process of continued research by District staff. The CILT should engage in continued analysis of these data to explore possible relationships to student achievement and other needs. In looking at lessons learned through the self-study processes in which the District has engaged, there are archival data to suggest that the CILT should continue to observe the processes being acted out by the school-based staff. These observations will enrich the decisions made to plan and implement additional leadership development sessions. Using the findings of this study, the District has an opportunity to build on the base established to this point and continue to assess growth over time.

Assessing growth over time could begin with the District completing the cycle of administering the School as Learning Organization survey and Collective Efficacy Scale instruments again. Given the findings of a significant relationship between collective efficacy beliefs and student reading proficiency (Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas, 2005), the District should continue to explore these relationships. The District may want to expand the data being gathered on collective efficacy by administering the entire instrument. Such implications highlight the beauty of the District becoming a self-study district. When a district gathers data regularly for multiple purposes and

uses instruments that are well-grounded in research, such as the work of Hall and Hord (1987, 2001), multiple credible opportunities arise to explore further the relationships of culture and contextual issues to student learning. The Suburban District CILT believes that they are creating the conditions for improved achievement through this PLC initiative. The results are not yet evident, but this should not deter the District from building on the understandings gained during this initiative.

The study found that schools, like students, have different needs in their efforts to develop the supportive conditions of a learning organization. While the findings revealed that many of the District's actions were perceived as supportive to school efforts, the CILT should continue to explore how to effectively differentiate its actions and supports to align with individual school needs. In order to sustain school efforts to develop PLCs, the District CILT must help schools "know what to do."

Implications for Policy

The results from this research have implications for Board of Education policy setting in several areas. These include the specification of Board requirements for supporting the initiation of district initiatives, the process of providing professional development to staff, and the decision-making process for Board allocation of district resources to initiatives.

School district leaders have traditionally sought the support of the Board to undertake initiatives within the context of their yearly budgetary request. These requests are only rarely preceded with extensive justification of the improvement initiative by research-based literature. Local district Boards of Education should begin to require that district leadership share evidence that the practices being used in

the district have documented credibility and promise as demonstrated through the research literature. While research may reflect multiple views of the impact of an identified improvement practice, Boards would become more skilled in their consideration of the application of improvement strategies to the local context and local values and vision for the schools.

In the case of this Suburban District, the Board had already approved an approach to the desired format for providing professional development within the District. The Comprehensive Professional Development Plan (CPDP) had not moved forward despite receiving Board approval. Establishing an expectation that the superintendent keep focused on such plans would ensure that the implementation of Board approved strategies occur. If actions such as the CPDP were initiated by the superintendent, then there should be sustained attention to the issue. If contextual conditions modify the importance of the previous decision, then the Board should be so informed and the decision action modified or reprioritized. These policy practices would better support a voluntary, part-time Board in understanding the coherence of the requests and actions being taken by key district leaders.

The consistent review and reprioritization of plans and initiatives by the Board leads to a third policy implication concerning the allocation of resources by the Board and district leaders. The *Bridge to Excellence Act (2002)* was enacted in Maryland two years prior to the period of this study. As a result, Boards of Education of local school districts were required to make decisions that align the budget with this *Act* and to show the alignment between their decisions and how funds were to be spent. Having the district move to a self-study system of operation through action research

models offers the type of data that a Board needs to determine its initial support of an initiative or continued support of programs by having the opportunity to see the status and impact of the efforts of the district staff on program goals. The reports to the Board on these impacts would establish promising or proven links to the improvement of student achievement.

Ongoing status reports to either the Board or designated structural entities within the district are necessary for understanding the application of research proven practices to the local context. Districts that begin their improvement initiatives through the review of research must still apply that learning to the local context. When you do systemic research within the context of a local district you begin to see much different patterns. There is the potential for the district leaders to be overwhelmed with the data they gather. It is imperative that districts make efforts to try to understand the implications of data they track over time in the context of local conditions. Boards must make policy decisions based on how efforts are producing results in their own jurisdiction. This process will require an understanding on the part of the Board that continual feedback of successes and challenges in reform efforts must be built into decision-making considerations, and are productive guides for program adjustments.

Implications for Practice

When districts engage in action research about their work they learn a great deal about the effectiveness of their leadership practices and initiatives. When districts operate as learning organizations, they assume a culture of continuous improvement and therefore model for school leaders and faculties the characteristics

of a learning organization. The Suburban District should continue to operate in this manner by using the data gathered in their work on this initiative to determine future actions in this and other areas.

The District gathered multiple forms of data during the two years of this study. These data were not all utilized during that period and the data were not explored to determine all potential relationships of factors that may influence student learning. The value for districts of engaging in self-study lies in the ongoing learning gained through continued analysis of such influences. The District must continue to use the data gathered, as well as subsequent data, to explore important linkages between aspects of personal, school, and district conditions and operations. The in-depth exploration of these data will illuminate the next challenges and opportunities for improvement. This study and others conducted on the outcomes associated with the PLC initiative provide some evidence that the Suburban District is creating the conditions for achievement. However, in order to justify a continued focus on the initiative, such evidence must be verified by continued action research.

One example of this is the continued exploration of the relationship between the dimensions of PLCs, collective efficacy, and student achievement as measured on state and federal assessments. The District should continue to examine teacher perceptions of collective efficacy as part of the ongoing research about reading and mathematics achievement (Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas, 2005). The District is trying to understand differences in how schools go about improving student learning, and how to work with and treat them differently in supporting their efforts to become PLCs. When the members of the CILT learn from their actions, they are energized to

become more analytic and to take additional varied actions in support of school culture change. As researchers, district leaders have the power to turn the results they get into powerful arguments for supports from the Board and community. This allows the districts to have a better chance to show their efficiency and effectiveness and gain support and resources for continuous improvement.

Finally, the Suburban District would find the process of data analysis more efficient and useful if the NVIVO software were used. As the superintendent, I have begun to realize the multiple application opportunities this software offers in a school system's efforts to be more effective. This could be accomplished in several ways. For example, typing brief notes, comments, and abbreviated transcripts during meetings and planning sessions would capture data that could be meaningfully coded and used to illustrate the processes being used by staff groups. Additionally, the application of technology would easily support the process of gathering, analyzing, and reporting data and patterns to the Board and other constituents. This process moves the District's action research to a systematic level, allowing the District to easily pull together qualitative data with quantitative data, revealing a more robust picture of what is really going on in the work of the District.

This study indicated that the data gathered by the CILT influenced their action decisions and refinements of the direction of the initiative. Data gathered by the CILT and shared with school-based ILT members were well-received and created credibility across the District. Building on this strategy is imperative.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

Studies such as this reveal additional research is needed, and several areas emerge as potential directions for future research. One such topic, the continued exploration of the relationships between collective efficacy, the dimensions of PLCs, and student achievement, is imperative if the allocation of resources to this reform approach is to be justified. Another topic, understanding how teachers' feelings of effectiveness influence their implementation of district and school actions should also be studied. If we see that teachers perceive that progress is being made in the development of the conditions of PLCs in their schools, and their sense of collective efficacy is also increasing along with student achievement, then the functioning PLCs would begin to feel more efficacious. This would spur the growth of the use of the deeper inquiry-based PLC process of teacher learning.

This dissertation provides a basis for a recommendation that districts and schools must engage in self-study. The type of self-study undertaken by the Suburban District is a deeper approach than a data audit that is often viewed as self-assessment. Self-study requires a very systematic process of looking across the systems presented in the adapted social systems model, including the internal and external environmental contexts. It is, therefore, a strong recommendation that districts engage in this type of intentional analysis.

Districts need to study their actions and system interactions over time to understand the potential for longitudinal results and patterns of change to occur. An example of such a pattern would be creating an understanding of the changes in PLC

perceptions of teachers over time. If the conceptual understanding of a true PLC culture of a school increased we might see teachers make more realistic assessments of the true status of their schools progress in creating such a culture. The gap between espoused and real understanding of school conditions would narrow, but at the same time, teachers might subsequently report the perception that they are making less progress in achieving the desired culture change. Without an understanding of individual motivation gained from study of models of change such as the social systems model, district leaders might misinterpret such a decline, and conclude that their efforts to support PLC development had failed. The ongoing nature of self-study is evident in this example.

Partnering with local universities provides tremendous support in developing the analytic skills of leadership staff. The coaching relationships that could be developed would yield tremendous payoffs for districts, schools, and universities. The university linkages to research to support the work of districts, as well as the linkages for universities in developing theory and policy recommendations, are evident from this study.

Limitations

Single case study research cannot always be transferred to other cases. Policy and other recommendations must be made cautiously due to the variability of performance and perceptions within and across cases. Case studies by their very nature have limitations (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The challenge of separating case study research from the phenomenon being studied is always present (Yin, 2003). The focus of this District initiative was about creating the culture of a learning

organization through the PLC inquiry process. Other districts will need to consider the contextual and perceptual links between this case and their needs.

While there are perceived limitations resulting from this case in my voice as superintendent, the methodology was intentionally designed to address these concerns. Findings emerged through the analysis of multiple comparative data points, the ten schools, and review of many District artifacts. These findings were further verified through a comparison of survey data and interview data. Both qualitative and quantitative data were compiled through the use of the NVIVO software and systematically processed and filtered to avoid bias in the compilation and analysis of data. A critical friend system of data review also served to avoid bias. The study developed for the 2005 American Educational Research Association in Montreal, Quebec (Mawhinney, Wood, & Haas, 2005) provided further opportunities for critical review of data analysis and interpretation.

Contributions

The study contributes to a clarification of the appropriateness of district actions selected to meet the needs of schools. The inherent trade offs of choices made by district leadership influence the work done at the school level. The perceptions shared by school leaders can inform other districts about how their actions may influence the work of their key school leaders, and how their actions might be perceived by those leaders.

The inherent value of using a heuristic framework or model to conduct systematic analysis adds value to the literature on district reform. Districts need ways of thinking about their work that requires some support. The two heuristic models

presented contribute to the options districts have in thinking about and studying their own work.

This study enhances the insights that can be gleaned from the small body of case study research on districts actions supporting school improvement. It tells the story of a district that actually tried to develop and engage in an action research culture. In doing so, the study provides a more robust picture of the change process and actions taken by school district leaders. The detailed descriptions and analytic explanations of the actions the District took demonstrated the thinking of the leadership of one district as they went through the daily work of making and acting on their decisions. By using a district implemented action research model, a more dynamic picture of the change process, with its challenges, opportunities, and choices, is revealed to others.

Closing Note

This study was undertaken because of the interest I had, as the superintendent of a district, to identify reform approaches that had the long-term promise of increasing student achievement. The ongoing demands for reforms in leadership and teachers' approaches over the past decade have left local school faculties exhausted or cynical about the changes they have been asked to make.

The need for a reform approach that would offer a continuous support to the adaptations needed in the context of assessment and accountability left me questioning how to best support sustained change and how to most effectively utilize the resources of the district. This study allowed me to see the value of practitioner involvement in academic research and the energy generated when staff see the

rewards of their intensive work. Although there were significant challenges in doing such intensive research while carrying out the demanding responsibilities required of a superintendent, this study has had a profound impact on how I serve in this important role.

As a result of this research experience I have personally gained strong commitment to the culture of a district of inquiry and schools of inquiry. This commitment includes a sense of responsibility to model this process for the schools and to engage in regular discussions with school-based leadership about their movement to that same inquiry practice. Having the superintendent assist in identifying action research studies at the school level and supporting the schools in their initial efforts to formalize this research and write up a brief research report will help schools take those next critical steps toward PLCs. The ability to engage in such discussions requires that superintendents stay close to what is occurring in schools in the district. The intentional development of these personal skills as well as the means of interacting with school-based leadership on action research is essential.

School Boards who intend to require and support this kind of self-study culture need to ensure that their superintendent has or develops the skills and attitudes necessary to fulfill this requirement. The support of the Board of Education in conducting action research is appreciated. The interest of the Board in this process has increased the amount of discussion that occurs at Board meetings about classroom practice. The design and communication of inquiry methods allows all governance structure and people to be aligned in their work and efforts.

Appendix A. School as Learning Organization Survey

School as Learning Organization Survey for Teachers

Number of years in teaching		Number of years at your current school		Gender	What grade level do you teach for the majority of your time this year?	How many years have you taught this grade level?	
				<input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/> Female			
1	1	1	1		<input type="radio"/> PK	<input type="radio"/> 6	1
2	2	2	2		<input type="radio"/> K	<input type="radio"/> 7	2
3	3	3	3	Do you teach at least one course for which there is a High School Assessment?	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 8	3
4	4	4	4		<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 9	4
5	5	5	5	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 10	5
6	6	6	6		<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 11	6
7	7	7	7	Do you teach tenth grade English?	<input type="radio"/> 5	<input type="radio"/> 12	7
8	8	8	8	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No		<input type="radio"/> NA	8
9	9	9	9				9
0	0	0	0				0

Directions: This questionnaire concerns your perceptions about your school as a learning organization. There are no right or wrong responses. Please consider where you believe your school is in its development of each of the five numbered descriptions shown in bold-faced type. Each sub-item has a five-point scale. On each scale, darken the bubble that best represents the degree to which you feel your school has developed.

Example

5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	✓	7	1	1
○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
					Like this			Not like this								

1. School administrators participate democratically with teachers sharing power, authority, and decision making.

1a	5 ○	-- ○	-- ○	-- ○	4 ○	-- ○	-- ○	-- ○	3 ○	-- ○	-- ○	-- ○	2 ○	-- ○	-- ○	-- ○	1 ○
Although there are some legal and fiscal decisions required of the principal, school administrators consistently involve the staff in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	Administrators invite advice and counsel from the staff and then make decisions themselves.								Administrators never share information with the staff nor provide opportunities to be involved in decision making.								

1b

5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Administrators involve the entire staff.					Administrators involve a small committee, council, or team of staff.							Administrators do not involve any staff.				

2. Shared visions for school improvement have an undeviating focus on student learning and are consistently referenced for the staff's work.

2a	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Visions for improvement are discussed by the entire staff such that consensus and a shared vision results.					Visions for improvement are not thoroughly explored; some staff agree and others do not.					Visions for improvement held by the staff are widely divergent.						
2b	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Visions for improvement are always focused on students and teaching and learning.					Visions for improvement are sometimes focused on students and teaching and learning.					Visions for improvement do not target students and teaching and learning.						
2c	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Visions for improvement target high quality learning experiences for all students.					Visions for improvement address quality learning experiences in terms of students' abilities.					Visions for improvement do not include concerns about the equality of learning experiences.						

3. Staff's collective learning and application of the learnings (taking action) create high intellectual learning tasks and solutions to address student needs.

3a	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	The entire staff meets to discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from each other.					Subgroups of the staff meet to discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from each other.					Individuals discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from each other.						
3b	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	The staff meets regularly and frequently on substantive student-centered educational issues.					The staff meets occasionally on substantive student-centered educational issues.					The staff never meets to consider substantive educational issues.						
3c	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	The staff discusses the quality of their teaching and students' learning.					The staff does not often discuss their instructional practices nor its influence on student learning.					The staff basically discusses non-teaching and non-learning issues.						

3d	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	The staff, based on their learnings, makes and implements plans that address students' needs, more effective teaching, and more successful student learning.					The staff occasionally acts on their learnings and makes and implements plans to improve teaching and learning.					The staff does not act on their learning.						

3e	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	The staff debriefs and assesses the impact of their actions and makes revisions.					The staff infrequently assesses their actions and seldom makes revisions based on the results.					The staff does not assess their work.						

4. Peers review and give feedback based on observing each other's classroom behaviors in order to increase individual and organizational capacity.

4a	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Staff regularly and frequently visit and observe each other's classroom teaching.					Staff occasionally visit and observe each other's teaching.					Staff never visit their peers' classrooms.						

4b	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Staff provide feedback to each other about teaching and learning based on their classroom observations.					Staff discuss non-teaching issues after classroom observations.					Staff do not interact after classroom observations.						

5. Conditions and capacities support the school's arrangement as a professional learning organization.

5a	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Time is arranged and committed for whole staff interactions.					Time is arranged but frequently the staff fails to meet.					Staff cannot arrange time for interacting.						

5b	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	The site, structure, and arrangements of the school facilitate staff proximity and interaction.					While the facility and school membership are large, the staff are working to maximize existing arrangements for interaction.					The staff takes no action to manage the facility and personnel for interaction.						

5c	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	A variety of processes and procedures are used to encourage staff communication.					A single communication exists and is sometimes used to share information.					Communications devices are not given attention.						
5d	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Trust and openness characterize all the staff.					Some of the staff are trusting and open.					Trust and openness do not exist among the staff.						
5e	5	--	--	--	4	--	--	--	3	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	1
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	Caring, collaborative, and productive relationships exist among all the staff.					Caring and collaboration are inconsistently demonstrated among the staff.					Staff are isolated and work alone at their task.						

For the following statements, indicate your level of agreement from STRONGLY AGREE (1) to STRONGLY DISAGREE (6).

SA						SD	
1	2	3	4	5	6		
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		1. Teachers in the school are able to get through to the most difficult students.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		2. Teachers in this school have what it takes to get the children to learn.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		3. Teachers here need more training to know how to deal with difficult students.
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		4. Teachers in this school truly believe every child can learn.

Appendix B. SLO PLC Brief report for Schools

Good Teaching in Every Classroom: Building a Climate for
Learning in the Suburban School District

The workplace of the 21st century will demand individuals who are knowledgeable and well-trained, capable of complex thinking, and able to process information and to communicate orally and in writing. Americans will have to compete internationally in this workplace. Yet the performance of American students on an array of achievement tests, including the SAT, the NAEP tests of reading and mathematics, and TIMMS assessments, among others, suggests that many are not achieving necessary skills. In particular, students who are poor, disabled, or from racial or language minorities continue to perform below expectations.

The public schools are being asked to educate all students to high levels. State-level accountability initiatives have been common since the early 1990's and generally have included widespread student testing, public reporting of results, and the labeling of schools as "effective" or "needing improvement." To meet accountability challenges, states, school districts and schools throughout the nation have been implementing a variety of reform strategies. By and large these strategies focus on ways to build the capacity of schools to provide good instruction so all students can learn. They include establishing uniform curriculum standards, innovative instructional practices, and common assessments and accountability and also include changes in the design of the school day and more focused and intentional professional development for teachers.

Focused and intensive statewide school reform in Maryland began in 1991 with the Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP), a comprehensive school accountability initiative. Annually, student performance on the state's assessment instrument, the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), along with other test scores, attendance, and drop-out statistics, was reported for every public school in the state. Schools were judged in terms of the proportion of

students meeting the MSPAP performance standards, and rewards or sanctions were assigned accordingly.

In 2001, MSPP was terminated with the passage of landmark federal legislation, the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Based upon five goals, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) mandates annual testing and reporting of student performance and holds schools and districts accountable for regular increases in the proportion of students, in the aggregate and disaggregated by race, poverty, English language learning, and special education, who demonstrate proficiency in reading and mathematics. In addition, NCLB mandates a highly-qualified teacher work force and schools that are safe and free from drugs and violence.

NCLB GOALS LISTED

1. ALL STUDENTS WILL DEMONSTRATE PROFICIENCY IN READING AND MATHEMATICS BY 2013-014;
2. ALL STUDENTS WILL DEMONSTRATE PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH;
3. ALL STUDENTS WILL BE TAUGHT BY HIGHLY-QUALIFIED TEACHERS;
4. ALL STUDENTS WILL GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL;
5. ALL STUDENTS WILL LEARN IN SCHOOLS THAT ARE SAFE AND DRUG-FREE.

The ambitious performance standards of NCLB have raised public expectations for student achievement along with concerns that the public schools may not, as they are currently constituted, be able to meet those expectations within the ambitious time frame mandated by the legislation. Because of NCLB, Knapp et al (2003) have observed, "a sense of urgency pervades public education these days as students struggle to meet the high standards set by their state and the nation."

Maryland has responded to NCLB with a new accountability program based upon new curriculum standards, a comprehensive Voluntary State Curriculum, and student achievement tests. Anticipating the challenges of NCLB, school system leaders in the Suburban School District examined trends and patterns of student achievement since MSPP was implemented a decade ago, with particular attention to differences between schools and sub-groups. They found that whereas the majority of students were achieving satisfactorily on state and national tests, certain subgroups, particularly African-American and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and students in poverty, were consistently achieving below their peers and would be unlikely to meet new and more rigorous curriculum standards associated with NCLB. These "at risk"

ONE ESTIMATE SUGGESTS THAT AS MANY AS 20,000 SCHOOLS NATIONWIDE WILL BE IDENTIFIED AS "NEEDING IMPROVEMENT" AS A RESULT OF NCLB (SUSAN NEUMAN, 2003).

students, moreover, were most likely to be enrolled in a few schools. They also observed that more and more new teachers were being hired each year by the district to meet the needs of an increasing school population and, more troubling, that these new teachers were disproportionately represented in those schools serving large numbers of at-risk students.

District leaders recognized that higher student performance standards and new state-mandated curriculum pose challenges to all teachers and particularly to inexperienced and less-prepared teachers.

They recognized that teacher effectiveness is the key to meeting those standards and set about

- 44% OF TEACHERS IN SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT IN 2002 HAD LESS THAN FIVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE.
- AMONG THE FOUR SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ENROLLING *MORE THAN* 50% POOR CHILDREN, AN AVERAGE OF 32% OF TEACHERS EARNED ADVANCED PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATES AND TEACHERS REPORTED AN AVERAGE OF 9.9 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE. –
- AMONG THE SEVEN SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS SERVING *FEWER THAN* 5% POOR CHILDREN, AN AVERAGE OF 62% OF TEACHERS HAD EARNED ADVANCED PROFESSIONAL TEACHING CERTIFICATES AND TEACHERS REPORTED AN AVERAGE OF 14.30 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE.

systematically examining research on this topic. A growing body of evidence supports a strong relationship between teacher behavior and student learning. The research suggests that the most powerful way to improve student learning is to improve teacher performance. Some researchers have gone so far as to assert, “Of the inputs which are potentially policy-controllable, analysis indicates quite clearly that improving the quality of teachers in the classroom will do more for students who are most educationally at risk . . . than reducing the class size or improving the capital stock by any reasonable margin which would be available to policy makers (Strauss & Sawyer, 1986). Other researchers agree that teacher education, ability, and experience are consistently associated with increases in student achievement across all schools and districts. Some have argued that spending on teacher education is in fact the most productive investment for schools.

LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND (1999) REPORTS THAT “A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION” OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE SCHOOLS IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TEACHERS—IN ABILITY (ESPECIALLY VERBAL SKILLS), IN CONTENT PREPARATION (ESPECIALLY FOR MATH AND SCIENCE), IN TEACHING (PEDAGOGICAL) SKILL, AND IN EXPERIENCE.

If schools and districts were to make that investment, what kinds of training and education have the greatest potential for improving learning? Research suggests that effective teachers have learned to use skillfully a variety of teaching strategies to fit the needs of students and the demands of instruction. Mastering those strategies and using them intentionally and appropriately requires training and practice, and teachers who have had formal training and experience in the classroom are better able to select and apply teaching techniques that foster high-level learning among all students.

How can the support and training teachers need to improve student learning be provided? The capacity of the *school* acting alone to bring about that improvement is limited. Improving the quality of teaching so all students can learn demands action at the *system* level. Most research has focused upon the school as the unit of change and the school principal as primary change agent. However, ambitious goals for student achievement require the school system and

TEACHERS' ABILITY TO TEACH ALL STUDENTS EFFECTIVELY DEPENDS UPON BOTH PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS. AMONG THE FORMER ARE VERBAL ABILITY, KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT AND TEACHING, AND CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE. AMONG THE LATTER ARE THE "FIT" BETWEEN TEACHING ASSIGNMENT AND TEACHER KNOWLEDGE, AND SCHOOL CONDITIONS, INCLUDING CLASS SIZE, PUPIL LOAD, PLANNING TIME, OPPORTUNITIES TO PLAN WITH COLLEAGUES, AND AVAILABILITY OF APPROPRIATE MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT. SOURCE: LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND, 1999

schools to work together to support high-quality teaching. Researchers have studied effective school districts to learn about their practices. They have found a common thread: a strong focus on teaching and learning.

Researchers (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2003) studying school reform in successful California districts also found that in these districts, schools and the central office both focus upon teaching and learning as their main mission. They also identified characteristics common to improving districts: a system approach to reform, learning community at the central office, coherent focus on teaching and learning, support for professional learning and instructional improvement, and data-based inquiry

SCOTT THOMPSON (2002) HAS IDENTIFIED FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

THESE INCLUDE:

- A VISION, MISSION, POLICIES, ARE RESOURCES ALL FOCUSED UPON ENABLING ALL STUDENTS TO MEET HIGH STANDARDS;
- SYSTEM AND SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR MEETING STANDARDS;
- CONSISTENT GATHERING AND ANALYSIS OF DATA TO MONITOR PROGRESS AND IDENTIFY NEEDS AND CHALLENGES;
- PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS THAT IS INTENSIVE, ONGOING, AND JOB-EMBEDDED,
- PROVISION OF HEALTH AND SERVICES TO NEEDY STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.

(p. 10). They reported that superintendents in such districts focus on communicating a vision of the school as a learning organization, modeling data-based decision making at the district level, building the capacity of school-based administrators to lead for learning, and providing resources and technical support to schools.

Improvement requires strong leadership for the district and for schools. Leaders must establish a clear focus on learning, build professional communities, act strategically, create coherence, and build relationships and interact within the external environment.

THE MAJOR ROLE OF THE LEADER—WHETHER SYSTEM- OR SCHOOL LEVEL—IS TO CREATE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS, PROFESSIONALS, AND THE ORGANIZATION.
SOURCE: KNAPP. 2003.

Building the capacity of the school system to respond to the demands of NCLB for continuous improvement in student learning had to start with an understanding of the change process and a clear focus on leadership and instructional support to re-create schools as learning organizations. The NCLB timetable and the needs of teachers and administrators demanded both immediate and long-range intervention. To begin, recognizing that teachers needed assistance immediately in order to improve student achievement for NCLB, the superintendent re-deployed central office staff members to provide additional support to teachers. Teacher support teams including an instructional facilitator (who previously served as a central office supervisor) and a teacher mentor are shared by two schools.

THE LEADERS' NEW WORK FOR THE FUTURE IS BUILDING LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS WHERE PEOPLE CONTINUALLY EXPAND THEIR CAPACITIES. MICHAEL FULLEN—CITED IN DUFOUR, *JSD*, WINTER, 1997. 18. 1

School principals are expected to observe classroom instruction and student work on a regular basis, to engage teachers in professional conversations about teaching and learning, and to lead the teacher evaluation process in the school, supported by central office staff.

The larger task was to build the

CURRENTLY, ---MENTORS AND --- FACILITATORS SERVE 30 ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS; ---MENTORS AND FACILITATORS SERVE 17 SECONDARY SCHOOLS. REGULAR TRAINING SESSIONS WITH CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF PROVIDE TEAM MEMBERS WITH SUGGESTIONS FOR CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES. SPECIFICS REGARDING TRAINING SESSIONS? EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS—SILVER AND STRONG—PROVIDE TRAINING IN INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES. . .

capacity of schools to provide effective instruction so that all students can meet the challenges of rigorous learning. Traditional teaching—a “one size fits all” approach to instruction—guaranteed

MANAGEMENT IS STILL AN IMPORTANT DIMENSION OF THE PRINCIPALSHIP. HOWEVER, THE INSTRUCTIONAL DIMENSION IS THE KEY TO TOTAL SCHOOL REFORM. IF HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING IS TO OCCUR IN THE BUILDING, THE PRINCIPAL HAS TO LEAD THIS EFFORT.” SOURCE: SUPOVITZ & POGLINCO, INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN A STANDARDS-BASED REFORM. CPRE. 2001. P. 3

that the old patterns of school achievement, which clearly worked against many students, would simply be repeated and the high expectations for *all* students articulated by NCLB would not be met. The challenge to “business as usual” in the schools, though, was no less than changing the way people in the school perceived their roles and relationships and begin to work together.

We are learning from research that the most effective way to address this challenge is by transforming the school culture so that good instruction becomes the focus of attention in the school. That transformation requires the development of principals’ capacity to provide instructional leadership to their staff and a change in the focus of the principal.

That capacity includes building a vision of quality instruction (what it looks like in the classroom), establishing clear expectations for teachers, ensuring that good instruction is

WE HAVE COME TO REALIZE OVER THE YEARS THAT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LEARNING COMMUNITY OF EDUCATORS IS ITSELF A MAJOR CULTURAL CHANGE THAT WILL SPAWN MANY OTHERS. BEVERLY SHOWERS AND BRUCE JOYCE, CITED IN DUFOUR, JSD, WINTER 1997

occurring every day in every classroom, and creating a meaningful professional learning community where teachers feel safe and supported as they change their practices as a result of collaboration and study.

Morrissey (2000) described the concept of professional learning community as less a “reform initiative” per se than a supporting structure that permits a school to continue to develop capacity for

A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY (PLC) IS DEFINED AS A SCHOOL IN WHICH THE PROFESSIONALS (ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS) CONTINUOUSLY SEEK AND SHARE LEARNING TO INCREASE THEIR EFFECTIVENESS FOR STUDENTS, AND ACT ON WHAT THEY LEARN. SHIRLEY HORD, 1997-- *ISSUES . . . ABOUT CHANGE*, 6 (1), 1-8

change and improvement. As Leithwood and Louis (1998) suggested, that capacity is especially important to an organization (namely the school) which must continuously respond to new expectations and demands (for programs,

accountability, standards, etc.) from multiple stakeholders (staff, students, parents, the public, etc.).

For schools that are increasingly challenged to maintain instructional program coherence in a high-stakes accountability environment (see Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk, 2001, for a discussion of the concept of program coherence, its correlation with student achievement and its significance to school improvement), it is particularly important to build effective professional learning communities in each school to focus teachers' work and school resources. Five research-based dimensions of a professional learning community have been identified. These include the following:

1. Shared leadership: the collegial and facilitative participation of the principal, who shares leadership, power, authority, and decision making with the staff;
2. Shared vision: reflects staff commitment to student learning
3. Collective learning: the shared pursuit of solutions to address students' needs
4. Shared professional practice: the visitation and review of each teachers' classroom practice by peers for feedback and assistance to promote individual and school improvement
5. Resources: the physical conditions and staff characteristics that promote an effective school.

These dimensions are aligned with research on effective schools and organizations and address what Morrissey (2000) has labeled "core issues" in low-performing schools. Teachers' feelings of isolation from their colleagues in the absence of time to meet and collaboratively learn about instruction are addressed by dimension 5, Supportive Structures. Teachers' perceptions that many activities and functions unrelated to student learning were priorities in the school are addressed by dimension 2, Focus. Teachers' concerns about lack of trust, mutual respect, openness, and participation in decision-making are addressed by dimension 1, Shared Leadership. Teachers' perceptions that they have few opportunities to learn together are addressed by dimension 3, Collective Learning. And teachers' need to participate in collegial coaching by visiting other teachers' classrooms to provide feedback and to learn from their colleagues is addressed by Dimension 4, Shared Professional Practice.

Developing professional learning communities in the Suburban School District's schools began with an assessment of the readiness of teachers and administrators to participate. Identifying the features of the organization that are

likely to promote and to impede the establishment of professional learning communities can facilitate the development process. The *Descriptors of Professional Learning Communities* (see Appendix A) was designed by Hord (1997) as a means of gathering teachers' and administrators' perceptions about conditions in the school that are related to PLC. The survey consists of a series of scales associated with the five dimensions of PLC described above. Each scale consists of at least two descriptors which explain the dimension. The descriptors were designed as a series of three statements structured along a continuum that reflects most desirable practice to least desirable practice. The respondent reacts to each statement by indicating the point on the five-point scale that best corresponds to his/her opinion about the school. Each statement describes a condition that supports a professional learning community. The respondent selects the response on the scale which corresponds to his/her perception of that condition in the school.

Technical information about the instrument provided by the publisher tells us that the five dimension scores are reliable and valid. Analysis of local results confirmed the internal consistency of the scores. Suburban School District leaders, recognizing the relevance of teachers' perceptions of their own efficacy in getting all of their students to learn, decided to augment the Survey with three locally-developed items measuring teacher efficacy. Analysis showed these items to be independent of the remainder of the scale but coherent as a sub-scale (Cronbach alpha = 0.74).

During August, 2003, each school principal administered the survey to all faculty and school-based administrators. Survey forms were returned to the Office of Research and Evaluation for processing and analysis. Results of the survey are described in the figures which follow. Results are reported separately for each PLC dimension and reflect only teacher responses to the survey.

Results are reported in two ways. One figure compares mean scores (aggregated for elementary, middle, and high schools) to results from a sample of schools identified by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory to field-test the survey. For the field test, 21 schools were randomly sampled from four states. A second figure shows the range of mean scores calculated for the Suburban School District elementary, middle, and high schools. Table 1 reports for each level—elementary,

middle, and high school—the means and standard deviations for the field-tested schools and Suburban School District schools. Each school principal will receive a copy of the system-level summary of results as well as a more detailed analysis of results for the school.

Figure 1A describes results for Dimension 1, Principals' Facilitative Leadership. Compared to the field-test schools, Suburban School District's middle schools averaged slightly on this dimension whereas elementary and high schools were slightly lower. Figure 1B shows that middle schools varied least on this dimension and that elementary schools on the whole scored higher than both the high schools and the middle schools. Figure 2A shows that Suburban School District's middle schools scored about the same as the field-test schools while elementary and high schools scored slightly higher. On this dimension high schools varied somewhat less than elementary and middle schools, and elementary schools again tended to score higher than secondary schools. Figures 3A and 5A show Suburban School District schools averaging around the field-test school means with the range of school means again favoring the elementary schools. Suburban School District schools slightly outscored the field-test sample on Dimension 4, Classroom Observations. This dimension, like the other four, also showed a broader range of school means among elementary schools. Unlike the other dimensions, however, the elementary school range extended both above and below the secondary school ranges. Finally, in terms of Dimension 5, School Conditions and Capacities, Suburban School District schools averaged close to the field test schools at all three levels but elementary and middle schools represented a broader range of means than the high schools.

Taken together, survey results indicate that conditions favoring the establishment of professional learning communities are evident in Suburban School District schools to about the same extent as in the field-test sample. Elementary schools tend to score slightly higher than middle and high schools on all five dimensions; however, the elementary schools also display a wider range of perception, suggesting that schools vary more widely regarding staff perceptions about the conditions for professional learning communities to thrive.

Figure 1A
Principal's Facilitative Leadership

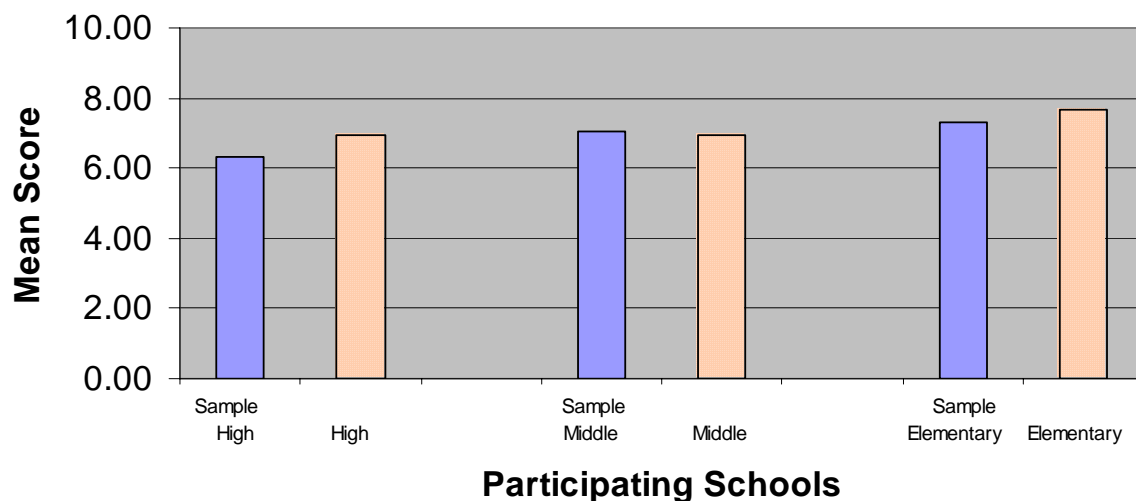


Figure 1B
Principal's Facilitative Leadership

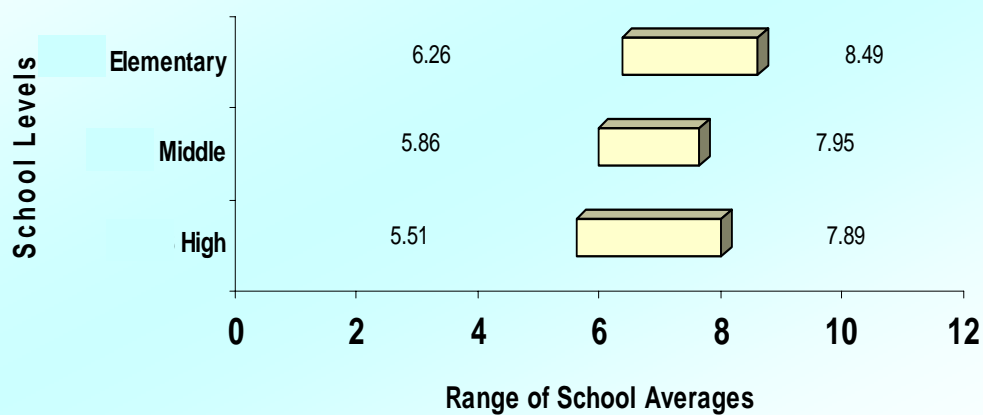


Figure 2A
Shared Vision for Improvement

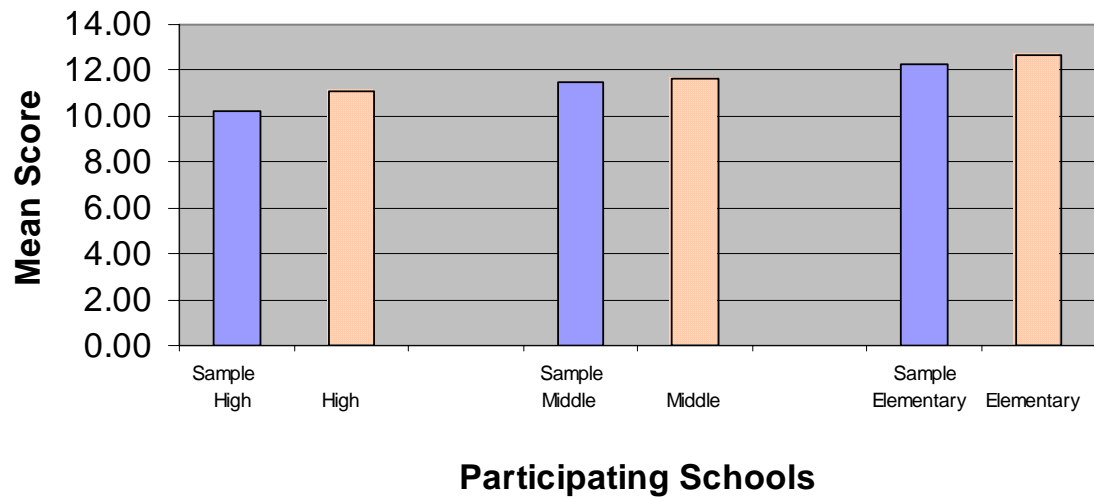


Figure 2B
Shared Vision for Improvement

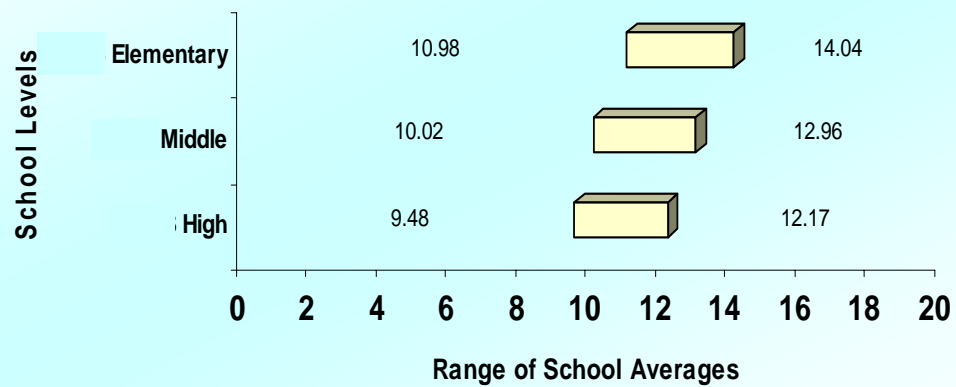


Figure 3A
Collective Creativity and Learning

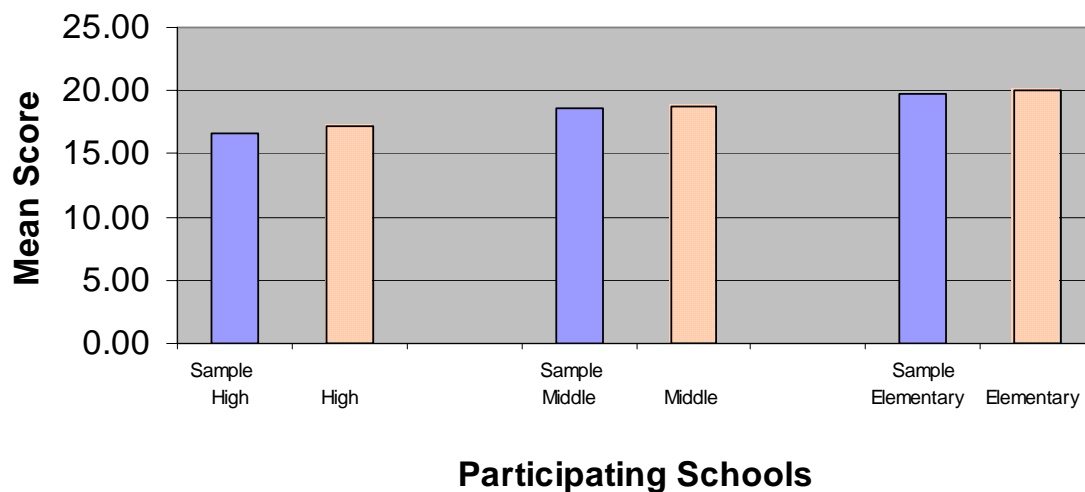


Figure 3B
Collective Creativity and Learning

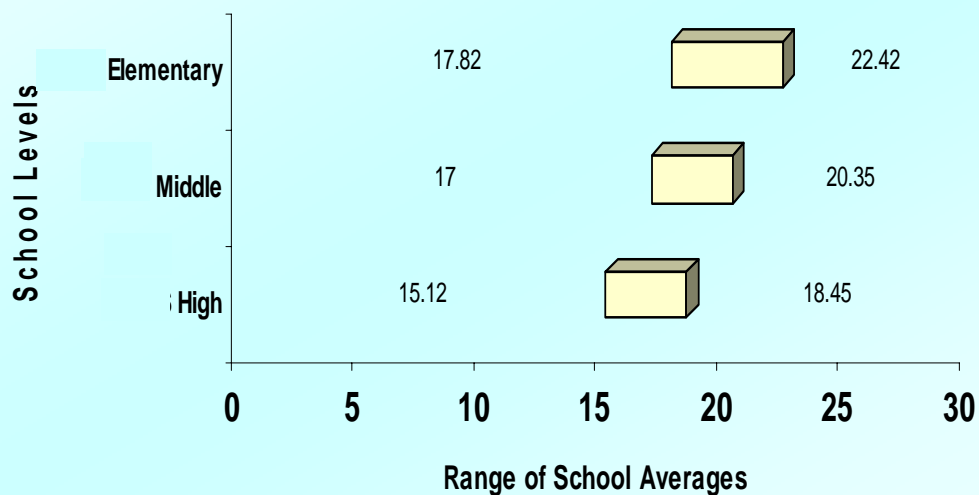


Figure 4A
Classroom Observations and Feedback

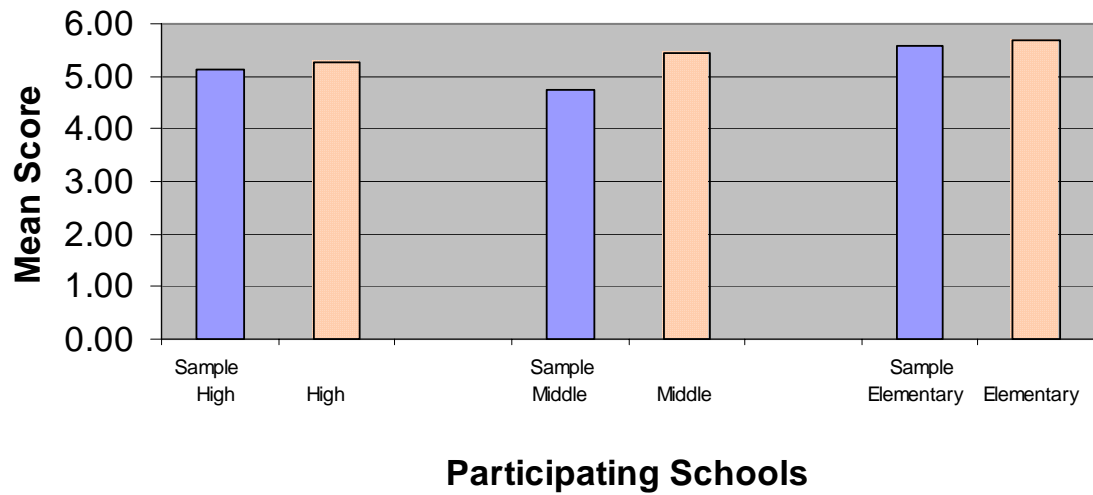


Figure 4B
Classroom Observations and Feedback

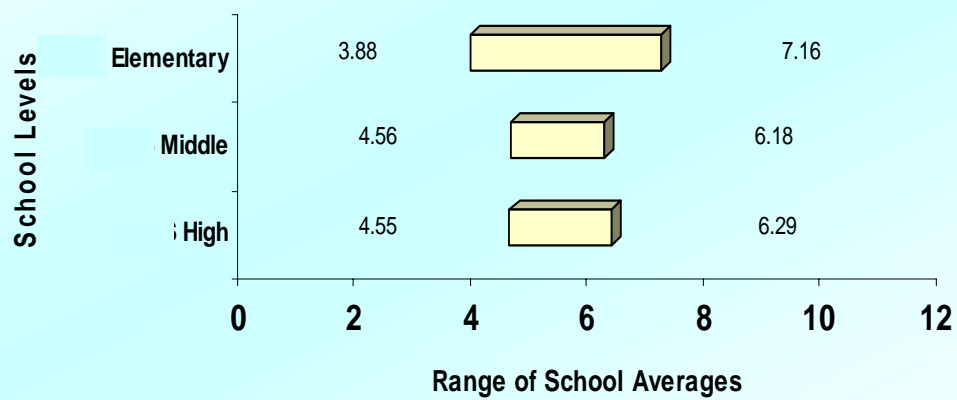


Figure 5A
School Conditions and Capacities

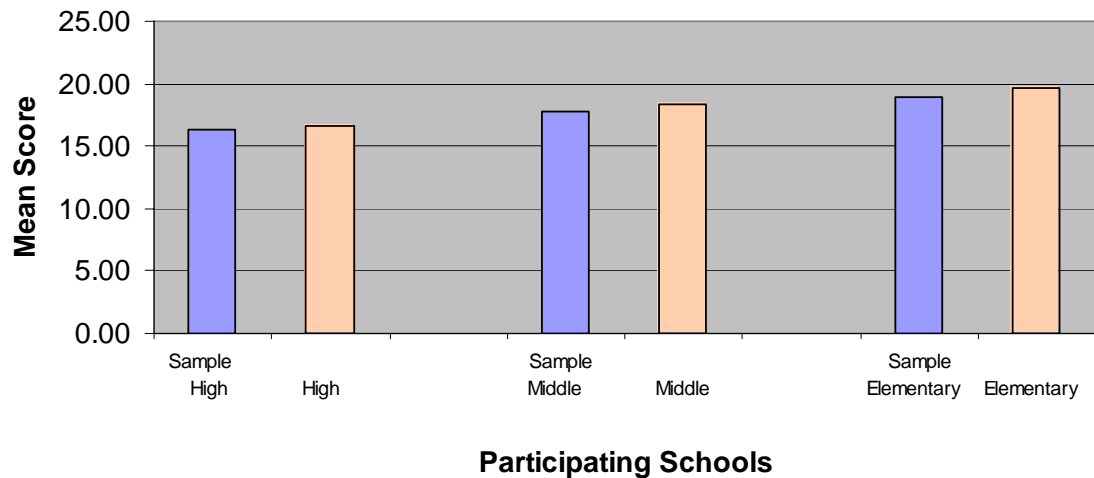
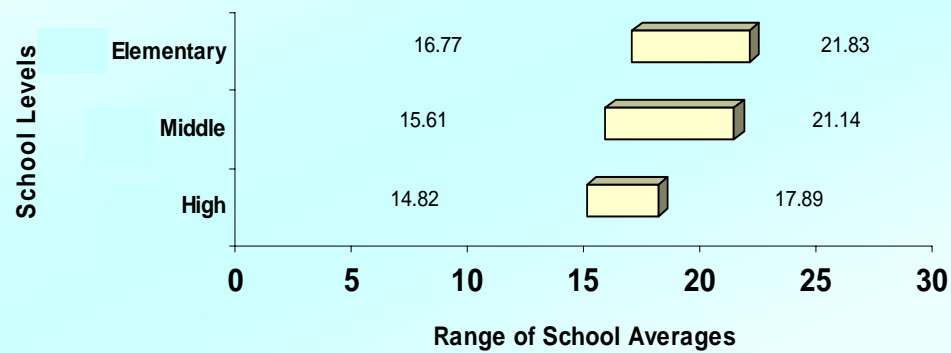


Figure 5B
School Conditions and Capacities



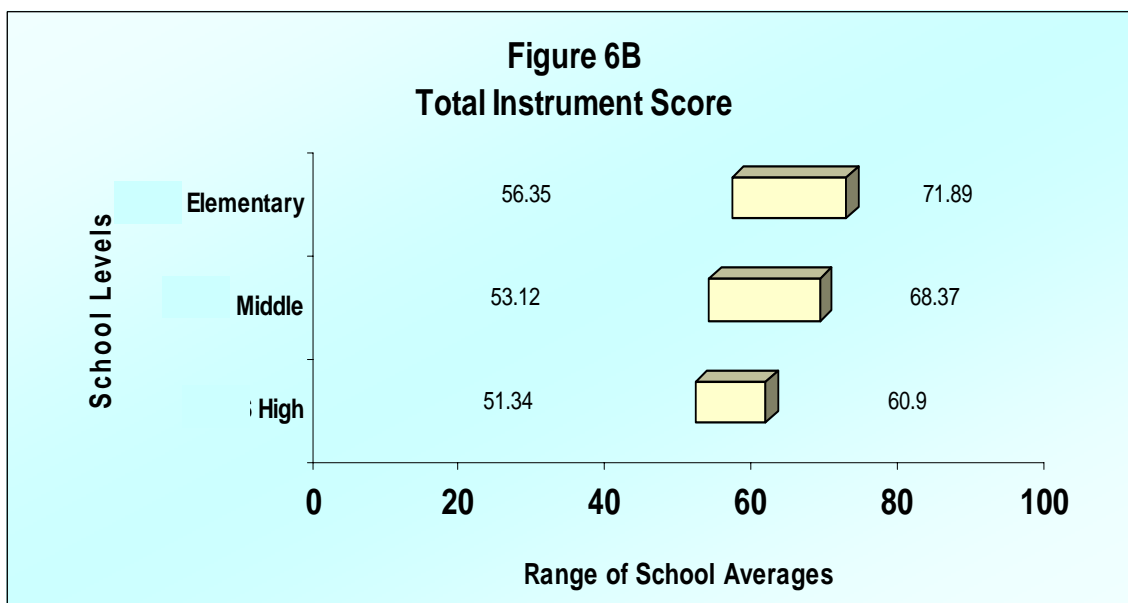
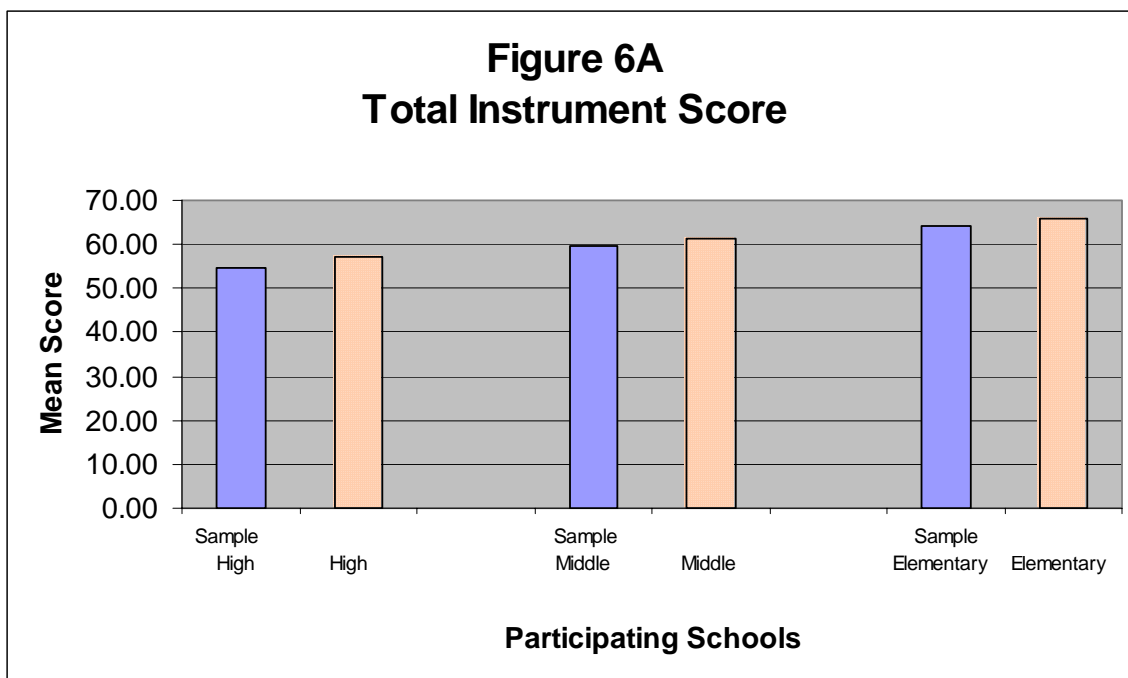


Table 1

PLC Survey Dimension Results: Means and Standard Deviations
 Shown by Level for Suburban School District and Field-Test Schools

Dimension	Range of Possible Points	Field-Test Sample: Elementary	Field-test Sample: Middle	Field-test Sample: High	HCPS Elementary: Mean(SD)	HCPS Middle: Mean(SD)	HCPS High: Mean (SD)
Principal Leadership	0 – 10	7.29	7.05	6.34	7.65 (1.43)	6.96 (1.60)	6.95 (1.62)
Shared Vision	0-15	12.29	11.47	10.24	12.69 (1.78)	11.67 (2.11)	11.10 (2.17)
Collective Creativity	0-25	19.68	18.66	16.55	20.04 (2.75)	18.68 (3.06)	17.19 (3.38)
Classroom Observation	0 – 10	5.60	4.74	5.11	5.68 (2.06)	5.45 (2.00)	5.26 (1.94)
School Conditions	0 – 25)	18.97	17.71	16.28	19.71 (3.07)	18.42 (3.57)	16.65 (3.63)

Appendix C. Individual Survey Letter to ILT Team members

**SUBURBAN DISTRICT SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION
INDIVIDUAL SURVEYS FOR STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SESSION**

Dear ILT Team Member:

Let me begin by thanking you in advance for your participation in the Interview Session concerning professional learning communities and the district's leadership actions concerning that initiative.

Attached you will find three pre-work pages that we are asking you to respond to prior to coming together on the date of the interview session. Each member of your ILT will receive separate sets of these pages. We are asking that you each provide your responses separately and do not collaborate on them. We are interested in seeing the similarity or diversity of your responses.

On sheet #1 you will need to read each possible district action/strategy and indicate whether the district engaged in this support action and how much it may have occurred. A key is included on the page for your reference.

On sheet #2 please rank the items as indicated at the top. Finally, on the third sheet please circle the number on the scale that represents your perception of where your school is with its progress on developing the conditions of PLCs in your school.

Please bring the three pages with you when you come for the structured group interview and I will collect them from you that day. Again, thank you for your participation in the district data collection.

Sincerely,

Facilitator Name

0 = none of this was done

L = a little of this was done

A = a lot of this was done

- _____ Reorganization of system, time, or schools or creation of supportive structures of some type to support your work
- _____ Resource allocation such as time, people, materials or special forms of funding
- _____ Defining vision, values, and beliefs about the value of PLCs
- _____ Assessing district and school needs and developing an initiative to support PLC development; providing or use of data
- _____ Defining and communicating expectations
- _____ Defining priorities & maintaining focus
- _____ Training
- _____ Monitoring and Oversight of school progress
- _____ Communication of vision messages to school administrators and school staff
- _____ Defining roles and responsibilities for ILT members and staff

Rank the district actions from most helpful to least helpful with #1 being the most helpful. Use NT if you feel the action was not taken by the superintendent or CILTs.

- _____Reorganization of system, time, or schools or creation of supportive structures of some type to support your work
- _____Resource allocation such as time, people, materials or special forms of funding
- _____Defining vision, values, and beliefs about the value of PLCs
- _____Assessing district and school needs and developing an initiative to support PLC development; providing or use of data
- _____Defining and communicating expectations
- _____Defining priorities & maintaining focus
- _____Training
- _____Monitoring and Oversight of school progress
- _____Communication of vision messages to school administrators and school staff
- _____Defining roles and responsibilities for ILT members and staff

<u>Initiation</u>		<u>Implementation</u>		<u>Institutionalization</u>
1	2	3	4	5

Rate your school on the level of implementation of PLCs.

#1 is beginning to initiate - #5 is full change in school culture and full implementation across the school and all teachers.

Appendix D. Interview Protocol

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Interview Protocol

Instructional Leadership (ILT) Teams

After convening the group in either a conference room or office where everyone fits and is comfortable (assure that the area is private) you can begin the discussion.

First, collect from each person the three pages we sent them ahead of time and place them all in the envelope. Thank the group for scheduling the time so that everyone can be there.

As a general direction you need to try to make the flow of this discussion seem less like formally structured questions, and more like a normal conversation. When you begin a topic of discussion, try to use some of their words to key off of when you want them to give more detailed examples or greater clarification. Our data will come from the richness of the dialogue you are able to get on tape from them. Use connecting phrases such as, “So it seems that you have . . .” or “Can you give me an example?” “Can you tell me how that worked out here at this school?”

We want the group participants to all have an opportunity to comment, so the more you can encourage them to verbalize details and descriptions it will provide better data.

You will note that I have given you the bolded primary questions and then I added what I referred to as secondary prompts. You can use these to have another way to try to get at the same type of information if the group is not very responsive to the primary question.

Statement: “The purpose of this session is to allow you to provide feedback on your thoughts about the role of the district – the Central Instruction Leadership Team – district actions and strategies – in supporting you as a school, and as a school Instructional Leadership Team with the current professional learning community initiative. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the discussion topics. The interview is to gain your perspective and feedback, not to evaluate anything that you say. In fact, your identity will be masked as the results come to the Central Instructional Leadership Team.”

“We will create a tape recording of our discussion today. The tape recording will not reveal your names. The tape will be given to a secretary who has been identified to type a transcript of the discussion. This secretary is not in the office of any of the members of the Central Instructional Leadership Team. She will not know any of you, nor will she recognize your voices. The Central Instructional Leadership Team will receive the transcript of the discussion. All this is being done to hopefully create an environment of comfort for all of you. Again, I want to stress that there is no right or wrong responses, and in fact, the depth of your discussion will be most instructive to the Central Instructional Leadership Team.”

“Are there any questions so far?”

“We have approximately 5 topical areas for discussion. We will proceed from one to the other until we complete them. I may need to seek clarification from you prior to proceeding to the next question. I may also need to go back later in the discussion to clarify something you might have said earlier.

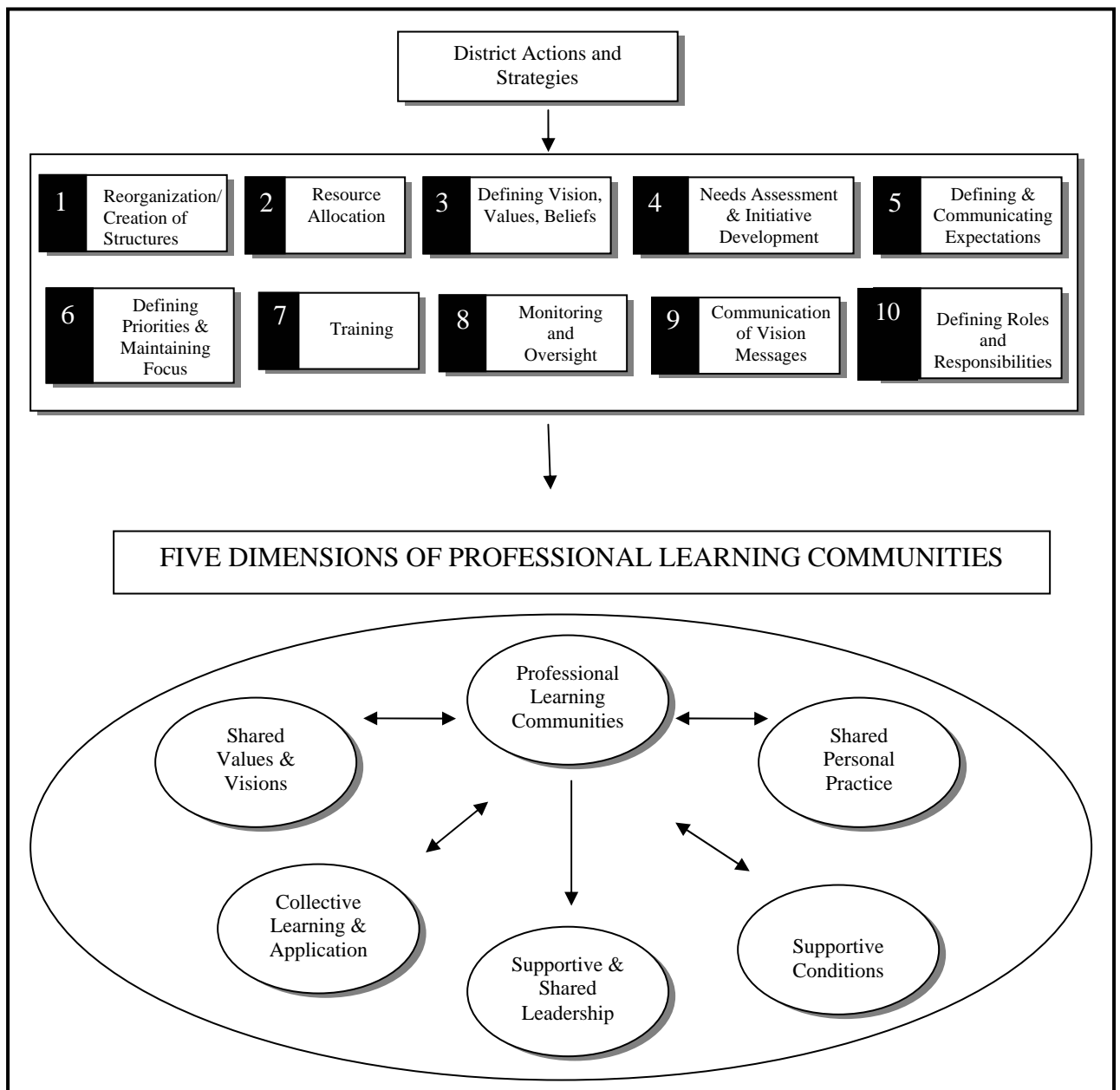
As you hear each question or topic, we will allow everyone to voice their opinion or viewpoint. You can support what another has said, disagree with what has been said, or expand on what someone else has said.

Are you ready to begin?”

Structured Questions

- 1. “You know we have been working on establishing PLCs in our schools and working on developing the five dimensions of PLCs. If you look at the diagram I have given you (handout of document #1) and that you see here on this small poster (POSTER #1 AND #2 SHOULD BE PLACED ON THE WALL NEARBY), we are wondering how the decisions or actions of the district leadership have influenced your school’s development of these dimensions.”**

(You can also ask the following secondary prompts if you need to encourage additional discussion and the prompts have not been addressed through the primary question responses: “Can you give me an example of a district action that was helpful?” or “Can you give me an example of a district action that posed challenges?”)



DOCUMENT #1

2. **“Can you share how any of these actions influenced what occurred in your school with PLCs?”**

(As a secondary prompt you could ask: “Can you share how you see evidence of this dimension in your school?”)

(As a secondary prompt you can also ask “How was that action helpful or supportive to your efforts in developing PLCs in your school?”)

3. **“Well, it seems as though here in your school you may have gone beyond the support given by the district leadership. Can you describe how your actions built on or were extensions of district actions?”**
4. **“A change in culture such as establishing PLCs takes time – often years. As you look forward to next year, what work is still to be done at your school with respect to PLCs?”**

(As follow up questions you can ask “How will you continue this work next year?” or “How will these things impact your school improvement plan?”)

5. **“What things do you need the district Central Instructional Leadership Team or superintendent to do that would better support your future efforts to develop PLCs in your school? How can they help more?”**

After you have completed all the discussion thank them for their willingness to be open and frank with their responses. Tell them that their responses will be processed and compiled with the responses of other schools. They will hear some summary information in the fall at an Educational Leadership Team meeting as has happened before with the mid-year report.

Place all of their response sheets in the manila envelope in which they came and seal with the tapes you used. Then bring and drop off in the Superintendent's Office.

Appendix E. Individual School Demographics

School	Enrollment	Mobility	Free/Reduced Meals	African- American	Caucasian	Teacher Experience n <5 yrs	Teacher Experience n >15 years
#1 ES	843	14.4%	8.9%	12.5%	80.5%	22	18
#2 ES	510	27.5%	42.2%	33%	57%	13	12
#3 ES	522	13.1%	12.5%	6%	87%	9	13
#4 ES	734	20.4%	25.7	27.5%	67%	23	11
#5 ES	407	10.6%	14.7%	3%	94%	3	13
#6 ES	138	21.6%	19.0%	5%	92.2%	2	4
#7 ES	699	24.3%	32.1%	34%	58%	20	10
#8 ES	259	22.5%	28.7%	2.5%	93.5%	4	5
#9 ES	483	27.7%	54%	49.5%	40%	12	8
# 10 ES	580	9.5%	4.9%	4.5%	88%	11	17
# 11 ES	578	6.6%	3.9%	2.0%	93%	12	11
# 12 ES	675	8.7%	4.8%	1.0%	94%	14	14
# 13 ES	650	8.1%	2.4%	3.0%	94%	4	11
# 14 ES	381	28.6%	48.4%	35%	57.5%	12	9
# 15 ES	349	35.2%	62.5%	51%	43%	19	11
# 16 ES	491	36.1%	56.8%	27.5%	61%	16	11
# 17 ES	692	8.4%	8.7%	4.5%	92%	15	12
# 18 ES	984	9.6%	7.6%	3.0%	91.5%	20	27
# 19 ES	466	5.9%	3.4%	0.5%	97.5%	2	24
# 20 ES	563	19.4%	19.1%	22%	72.5%	21	6
# 21 ES	573	28.1%	73%	61%	32%	27	7
# 22 ES	608	14.4%	17.6%	19%	78%	7	22
# 23 ES	193	7.6%	6.5%	0%	99.5%	2	10
# 24 ES	479	7.4%	7.2%	2.0%	94.5%	9	20
# 25 ES	541	11.6%	11.2%	0.5%	97%	10	14

School	Enrollment	Mobility	Free & Reduced Meals	African- American	Caucasian	Teacher Experience < 5 years	Teacher Experience > 15 years
# 26 ES	883	8.5%	4.9%	3.0%	90%	13	19
# 27 ES	571	6.7%	5.3%	2.0%	93%	18	12
# 28 ES	566	16.4%	26.9%	24%	71%	16	7
29 ES	566	37.1%	34.6%	37%	50%	20	14
# 30 ES	1,040	27.5%	42.8%	38%	55%	38	13
# 31 ES	518	9.8%	9.7%	9.0%	86%	12	13
# 32 ES	938	8.2%	3.8%	1.0%	96.5%	12	24
# 33 MS	1,290	25.8%	39.2%	35%	57%	46	25
# 34 MS	1,454	9.3%	7.4%	5.0%	89.5%	28	32
# 35 MS	1,355	24.0%	34.5%	34%	58.5%	50	15
# 36 MS	1,231	4.3%	5.6%	2.0%	95.5%	28	23
# 37 MS	652	23.1%	36.6%	18%	77.5%	14	16
# 38 MS	904	22.2%	37.3%	34%	61%	25	20
# 39 MS	1,200	7.1%	9.5%	2.0%	96%	25	28
# 40 MS	1,537	6.5%	5.7%	4.0%	91.5%	30	50
# 41 HS	1,240	30.1%	24.8%	35%	56%	34	18
# 42 HS	1,647	9.5%	3.8%	4.0%	91.5%	45	38
# 43 HS	1,799	7.9%	3.8%	4%	90.5%	39	41
# 44 HS	1,324	29.4%	23.1%	35%	57.5%	34	24
# 45 HS	1,670	5.5%	2.1%	2.0%	94%	32	38
# 46 HS	1,070	6.3%	9.7%	14%	81.5%	30	22
# 47 HS	676	23.3%	21.9%	19%	76.5%	14	26
# 48 HS	1,042	20.5%	20.9%	31%	63.5%	25	22
# 49 HS	1,421	10.3%	5.6%	1.0%	97%	34	29
# 50 Special Education School	154	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	14	32

Appendix F. Chronology of District Actions

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
4/14/02	Letter from Elem. Director	Director Elementary	Letter describes the initial services sought from Ext. consultant	CILTs	Resource Allocation Defining Focus	Structural Political
Aug. '02	Proposals	Superintendent	Proposals in response to the RFP that was issued by the Superintendent to identify a facilitator that could work with a representative staff group on reorganization	Superintendent	Reorganization Defining Vision, Values, Beliefs, Needs Assessment & Initial Development	Structural Cultural
10-14-24/02	Workgroup Artifacts	Superintendent	A workgroup was organized to allow input from all stakeholders on how the system should be reorganized: ext. consultant from Towson University facilitated	Superintendent Senior Staff	Same as above Functioning PLC; Collective Learning & Application Place and food created supportive conditions	Structural Cultural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
11/4/02	Zalesk Report	External Consultant	Summary report from facilitator on workgroup process, discussion, sample proposals	Superintendent Senior Staff Board	Reorganization Defining vision values beliefs Needs assessment; resource allocation	Structural Cultural
11/27/02	Ext. consultant Letter	External Consultant	Letter to P.S. describing the 3 training process. This later was modified to produce specific materials and training for HCPS on Best Bets, PLCs, ILTs, etc.	CILTs		Structural Political
Nov. '02		Superintendent	Formation of CILT – District Office Leadership Team	District Staff Board	All actions taken by district	Structural Cultural
Nov. '02	Folder with Materials	Superintendent	Meeting materials from select Senior Staff to determine how to begin to capture more school-based help from central office	Senior Staff	Reorganization Resource Allocation Defining vision, values, beliefs Defining priorities Defining roles & responsibilities	Structural Political Cultural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
11/7/02	Reflections	Superintendent	Random thoughts about reorganization were compiled by superintendent & G.S. They served as discussion points during a Saturday retreat on reorganization; they also guided the work of the senior team over time	Senior Staff	Reorganization Resource Allocation Defining vision, values, beliefs Defining priorities Defining Roles & Responsibilities Needs assessment	Political Cultural
11/16/02	Email	Assistant Superintendent	He shared some thoughts he had after attending a session at CEASOM Conference; thought was about the number of demonstration lessons that could occur with reorganization	CILTS	Reorganization; roles and responsibilities; need assessment and initiative planning	Cultural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
11/23/02	PowerPoint	Superintendent	Presentation made to Board in Work Session on a Saturday for 2 hours; intended to gain their support to move forward with reorganization; handouts included	Board of Education	Communicating Vision messages Defining vision, values, beliefs Reorganization/resource allocation Setting focus and priorities	Political
12/11/02	Memo	Assistant Superintendent	Draft considerations in revising the roles and responsibilities	Superintendent	Reorganization roles and responsibilities	Structural Individual
1/02/03	Memo	Assistant Superintendent	Memo introducing the original work that was done by Ext. consultant in HCPS	A&S Staff	Sets tone for PLC's and shared leadership training	Structural Political
1/13/03	Memo	Superintendent	This memo to the Board shares draft proposed new organizational charts	Board of Education	Reorganization Keep building support and coalition	Structural Political
Winter '02	Summary List	Assistant Superintendent	Dept. Chairs work with G.S. and D.V. on revised roles due to reorganization	Department Chairs	Defining vision, values Communication Visioning messages	Cultural Individual

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
Feb. '03	Implementation List	Assistant Superintendent	List of tasks and potential timeline for potential implementation of reorganization	Superintendent Senior Staff	Resource allocation Reorganization Initiative Development	Structural Political
2/6/03 3/13/03	School Improvement Seminar Responses	Assistant Superintendent Director of Research	To discuss pros and cons of publishing individual class data by teacher	ILT Teachers	Data Use Training	Political Individual Structural
3/11/03	PowerPoint	Assistant Superintendent Director of Research	To foreshadow reorganization; shared some of the slides Superintendent used with the Board; Roles begin to be clarified; input opportunity on reorganized roles and functions; data use	SIT Seminars	Communicating Vision messages; defining and communicating expectations; data use	Structural Cultural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
3/11/03	Responses from School Improvement Teams Agenda	Assistant Superintendent	Activity from SIT training sessions. Purpose was to have leadership and other SIT teacher members begin to assess what they are and what they should be spending their time doing; also input responses on new roles and functions	Principals Supervisors CILTs	Communicating vision messages Training Data collection and use Defining and communicating expectations Communicating roles and responsibilities Needs assessment for Initiative Development	Structural
3/26/03	Materials from Department Chairs	Assistant Superintendent Director of Secondary	Worked with Department Chairs to redefine role and to familiarize them with reorganization	Department Chairs	Defining roles and responsibilities Communicating vision messages Needs assessment and initiative development	Structural
4/4/03	Agenda+	Assistant Superintendent Director of Secondary	Ed. Leadership Team Mtg. where the results of the 5 questions asked during the SIT seminars are now shared	Principals Supervisors	Training Defining roles and responsibilities Defining and communicating expectations	Structural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
4/8/03	Question List	Assistant Superintendent	This is a list of questions from G.S. about the division of Curriculum & Instruction and issues related to the reorganization; digs deeper into the planning of how the new roles will operate; begin to suggest individuals for reassignment	Superintendent	Roles & Responsibilities Defining & Communicating expectations Initiative Development Reorganization	Structural
4/10/03	Personal Notes	Superintendent	Notes of Superintendent from discussion session with Ext. consultant as a planning session	CILTS	Roles and responsibilities Defining expectations for meetings	Structural Cultural
4/23/03	Email	Budget Director	This email outlines some funds that could be reallocated for the proposed reorganization	Superintendent	Resource allocation	Structural Political

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
4/23/03	Memo to Board	Superintendent	Superintendent memo to Board sharing names of staff to be reassigned. Intent was to head off any issue with specific folks the Board members may object to	Board of Education	Resource allocation Communicating vision messages Defining roles for specific people Initiative development	Political
4/23/03	Personal notes	Assistant Superintendent	G.S. personal notes on some tasks for reorganization	CILTs	Initiative development Allocation of fiscal resources	Structural Political
4/30/03	List	Superintendent	Guidelines for reorganization that need to be agreed upon by the CILT and communicated as people are reassigned	CILTs	Defining and communicating expectations for reorganization	Structural
5/2/03	Interview schedule	CILT	List of elementary people to meet with for assignment as mentors or Ifs	Staff	Reassigned reorganization Defining & communicating expectations Defining roles and responsibilities Communicating vision messages	Structural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
5/6/03	Memo	Assistant Superintendent	This memo summarizes the initial work done with Ext. consultant. It is attached to the lengthy 23 page memo from them	CILTs	Initiative development materials	Structural Cultural
5/7/03	Reorganization account list	Budget Director	This table was developed by Budget Office to keep the CILT informed about how the fiscal resources were being reallocated and to determine how many Ifs and mentors we could afford with vacancy money	CILT	Resource allocation	Political
5/9/03	Personal Reflections	Assistant Superintendent	A list of personal thoughts G.S. thoughts he wanted to share with the CILT	CILT	Initiative development ideas	Structural Cultural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
5/12/03	Plan for Discussion	Assistant Superintendent	The outline of what was to be discussed and presented 6/6/03 as we began our planning work with the thoughtful Education Group – external consultant who met with us to plan the Ed. Leadership for 6/6/03	CILTs and Ext. consultant	Initiative development Defining vision and values Defining training Defining priorities and focus	Structural Cultural
5/16/03	Email from Susan Morris	SS+	Reactions to G.S. email to external consultant; Shares external consult. thinking; Shares attached documents	CILTs	Planning Training Defining & Communicating Expectations Training for CILT	Structural
5/16/03	List	Assistant Superintendent	Reactions and thoughts after reading the email from external consultant		Initiative Planning	Structural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
5/19/03	Email+	Assistant Superintendent	Email from G.S. to ext. & consultant; CILTs shares information sent to them and sets possible dates for Annual Leadership conference consultation day	CILTs	Initiative development Training for CILTs	Structural
5/20/03	Proposal	Ext. consultant	Begins to offer an outline of the training to be provided to ILT members during the Summer (July – Early September); beginning to explore how to address PLC development		Initiative Planning Training Planning	Structural Individual
5/21/03	Email	Superintendent	From Superintendent to critical friend re: plans for June mtgs. And survey administrations	Critical Friend	Training Plan	Structural

Stage: Planning and Preparation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
5/27/03	Memo	Assistant Superintendent	This memo set forth the schedule for the summer training of the new ILTs and selected supervisors	Principals IFs Selected Superintendents	Training Defining & Communicating Expectations	Structural
6/1/03	Email	Assistant Superintendent	Verify with Superintendent his thinking on the information to share at the upcoming Leadership Meeting. First evidence of the establishment of CILTs	Superintendent	Defining Expectations Planning Training Allocation of inservice Time as a resource	Structural Political
6/1/03	Email Letter	Assistant Superintendent	Concerned the Art Teacher reactions to the reorganization work; This was to deal with their public presentation to Board	Superintendent	Needs Assessment	Political
6/4/03	HCEA Presentation	HCEA	PowerPoint by speaker from MSTa to Board and Superintendent on how things should be done	Board of Education Superintendent	Communicating vision messages	Political

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
6/6/03	Agenda + PowerPoint	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent	Materials from the Ed Leadership Team Meeting when the group received their second presentation on reorganization; Presentations covered purposes of reorganization; PLC language; new team configurations & roles; new meeting configurations; schedules	Principals & Supervisors	Training Communicating vision messages Defining expectations Defining roles and responsibilities	Structural Cultural
6/9/03	Personal Thoughts	Superintendent	Superintendent thoughts on things that have to be addressed with staff at schools; sent to all via email (with edits)	CILTs ILTs	Defining Priorities & Maintaining Focus Defining & Communicating Expectations Communicating vision messages	Structural Cultural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
6/12/03	Email	Assistant Superintendent	Sent to all ILTs concerning the reaction to the 6/6/03 Ed Leadership Mtg. and sharing dates for training in summer	ILTs	Training scheduled Defining expectations	Structural
6/19/03	Schedule of Meetings	CILTS	This is the schedule for each school to hold their end of the year session spelling out to their faculty the information on the reorganization and administer the SoC questionnaires	A&S	Monitoring & Oversight	Political

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
6/19/03	PowerPoint+	CILTS	Sample power point for ILTs to use in developing their presentations to their school staff on the reorganization and PLCs; SoC Questionnaires were done	ILTs All teachers	Training Initiative Development	Individual
6/23/03	Memo	Assistant Superintendent	Shared the possibility of reduced training and book costs from Ext. consultant	ILTs	Initiative development Resource allocation	Political
6/30/03	Memo	Assistant Superintendent	Shares information on training that will occur next school year (2003-2004)	ILTs Supervisors	Defining training schedule Communicating expectations Resource allocation	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
June '03	SoCQ Results	Superintendent	The statistical results of the questionnaires administered to the Educational Leadership on 6/6/03	CILTs	Needs Assessment	Structural
June 2003	Lists	Reassigned Supervisor	These materials were from two supervisors who asked to meet personally with the Superintendent to try to convince her that they had so many other duties which would cause serious system issues if they were reassigned in the reorganization	Superintendent CILTs	Reorganization	Political System
7/7/03	Memo	CILTs	Shared Master Calendar for the 2003-2004 school year	A&S Staff	Creation of new structure for training cycles	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
Summer 2003	Thoughtful Leadership Guide: Ext. consultant	Ext. Consult. By CILTs	This guide developed over the year as external consultant work in modules with our staff; modules address PLCs and Prof. Dev by teacher collaboration in different forms (these training extended from July through September to get all ILTs)	ILT Teams	Training	Individual System
Summer 2003	Journal Notes	Coordinator of Curr. & Prof. Development	Notes taken by K.S. during the summer training sessions	Personal notes for K.S.-self	Training for K.S.	Individual System
7/3/03	K.S. Letter	CILTs	Shared plans for support training for the mentors	Mentors	Training Resource allocation	Individual System

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
7/15/03	Letter	Director Elementary	Letter for shipment of books and other materials from external consultant (resource allocation)	CILTs	Resource allocation	Political
8/4-6/03	Feedback list	ILTs	Ext. consultant worked with all ILTs over the summer. The feedback from that training was summarized	CILTs	Needs Assessment	Structural
8/7/03	Agenda+	CILTs	Materials given to mentors at the 8/7/03 Mentor Camp planned to clarify their role as the new teachers begin to work	Mentors	Training	Individual

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
8/13-14/03	Materials	CILTs	From annual Leadership conference as we begin to further move the reorganization forward; time provided to plan school opening sessions with teachers at the schools; (missing agendas, etc.)	All A&S	Training Initiative development at schools Communication of Expectations Communicating vision messages	Structural individual
8/23/03	Survey	Superintendent	School as a Learning Organization that was administered to all school-based instructional staff	All teachers	Needs Assessment/Readiness	Structural
8/28/03	Memo	Assistant Superintendent	To share a joint action that would be taken by Central Supervisors and Ifs to build content knowledge and content observation skills of Ifs (Co-Observations)	ILTs	Training Defining roles and responsibilities	Individual

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
8/29/03	IF Agenda+	CILTs	Training provided to Ifs; most of the afternoon is on their role, time use and clarification of their needs Time Utilization	IFs	Training	Structural
8/29/03	Compiled List 9:42 a.m.	IFs	Compile list of questions the IFs have asked regarding job description in response to the activity on this date	CILTs	Defining roles and responsibilities Needs assessment	Structural
8/29/03	List of IF needs	IFs	This list compiles the things IFs feel they need help with and training on; some relate to resource allocations, some to ILT issues; some are role issues	CILTs	Needs assessment	Political

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
8/29/03	Training Evaluation	IFs	This list compiles the responses of the IFs on the end of the day evaluation of the training session with the IFs; Training was on	CILTs	Needs assessment	
9/3/03	R. Email 10:00 a.m.	Reassigned IF	To share with Dr. G.S. the current status of her defined role at the high school where she is assigned	Assistant Superintendent Coordinator of Curr. & Prof. Development	Role clarification	Political
9/5/03	Email	CILTs	Shared the 18 dates for the IFs & Mentor's meeting for the 2003-2004 school year	IFs & Mentors	Training dates Communicating expectations	Structural
9/8/03	List of IF Needs	IFs	Discussed at brief CILTs meeting	CILTs	Needs assessment Initiative development	Political

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
9/8/03	Meeting Handouts	Assistant Superintendent	G.S. met with central supervisors and discussed their new roles; meetings they would attend+	Supervisors	Defining roles and responsibilities	Structural
9/12/03	Memo	Superintendent	The memo shared the completion of the summer (July-Sept.) training with external consultant. The plan to have the ILT Team Members come separately to training during 2003-2004 was modified and all come at once	ILT Teams	Communicating expectations	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
9/15/03	Memo	Assistant Superintendent	To communicate suggestions about the work of ILTs with particular attention to the role of the Instructional Facilitator and the functioning of the ILT	ILT Central Supervisors	Defining roles and responsibilities	Structural
9/15/03	PowerPoint	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent	This presentation was for the MSDE Master Plan Review Team	MSDE Staff	Communicating vision messages	Cultural
9/19/03	Agenda+		Meeting cancelled	IFs & Mentors	N/A	
9/26/03	Notice to Mentors and IFs	CILTs	Notification that each has \$250 to attend a conference	Mentors & IFs	Resource allocation	Political
9/26/03	Agenda+	CILTs	Includes time spent on Best Bet, journal writing, clarification of time use, role of the department chair, content training on ILA, end of session feedback	IFs & Mentors	Training Defining expectations for ILT meetings Needs assessment	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
10/21/03	Ed. Leadership Team Agenda	Superintendent	Superintendent spoke of system priorities; a panel of mentors and principals spoke of their practices	Principals, PPWs Supervisors Central Office Staff	Training Vision, values, beliefs	Cultural
10/24/03	Agenda+	CILTs	Morning spent on various content knowledge building; PM spent on celebration of successful tips, sample tips shared from IFs & Mentors	IFs & Mentors	Defining roles and responsibilities Training on content knowledge	
10/30-31/03	Agenda+	CILTs	Training – develop and ILT as a PLC; Best Bets; job-embedded professional development	ILT Teams	Training Communicating vision messages for ILT functioning Needs assessment for ILT's	Cultural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
10/31/03	Exhibits from CILTs meeting	Coordinator of Curr. & Prof. Development	The CILTs group is now configured with the new school year 2003-2004. The artifacts are the summarized feedback from the first ILT training sessions for this summer and fall. The CILTs met to discuss them.	CILTs	Monitoring and oversight of ILT Needs assessment for initiative development	Structural
11/7/03	Agenda+	CILTs	Training – journaling, cognitive coaching, how to for staff development, discussion with the CILTs, focus on how to use prof. dev. to improve instruction and inc. achievement	IFs & Mentors	Training	Individual

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
11/11/03	Planning Agenda	Assistant Superintendent	CILTs met to plan for January and March ILT training and Ed. Leadership meetings in Dec., Feb., and April	CILTs	Initiative development	Structural
11/21/03	Agenda+	CILTs	Best Bet vocabulary training journaling, review feedback from new teachers survey 6/26/03 during end of year inservice; 5 articles on mentoring and supporting new teachers data from end of hear inservice for new teachers	IFs & Mentors	Training on Best Bet Defining roles and responsibilities with new teachers	Individual
12/2/03	Meeting notes	Assistant Superintendent	CILTs met and discussed long-range planning; data collection; where PLC's can be expected to emerge	CILT's	Initiative development Defining expectations Resource allocation	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
12/5/03	Agenda+	CILTs	“Lessons from the Field” Walkthrough experience at school with ext. consultant (cancelled due to snow)	IFs & Mentors	Training on Walk Throughs	Individual
12/12/03	Agenda+	CILTs	Training on content area knowledge; review of observation data, tuning protocol presentation on examining student work or classroom visits in a group; observation procedures; journaling	IFs & Mentors	Defining roles and responsibilities Communicating expectations on observations	Structural Individual
12/17/03	CILTs Planning Agenda	Assistant Superintendent	Discussed training schedule with external consultant; feedback from ILT members on issues; first observation data report; department chair issues	CILTs	Initiative development Monitoring and oversight on observations	Political Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
12/18/03	PowerPoint Agenda	Superintendent	Superintendent's presentation at Educational Leadership meeting share info on why PLCs; observation & evaluation process	Principals Supervisors	Sharing values and vision Communicating expectations Monitoring & oversight	Cultural Structural
12/19/03	Regional Minutes	Regional Principal Group	These minutes from a regional elem. Principals meeting are always sent to the Director. These minutes contained references to the need for role clarification	Superintendent	Needs assessment	Structural
1/6/04	CILT Planning	Assistant Superintendent	Discussions about the external consultant service; concern about time utilization of mentors & IFs; 3 yr. prof. dev. plan	CILTs	Monitoring and oversight of IF & Mentor utilization	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
1/9/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training on science content; mentoring; time utilization; supporting the IFs; data use	IFs & Mentors	Defining roles and responsibilities Monitoring and oversight Data Use	Individual Structural
1/16/04	Email	Assistant Superintendent	To announce his focus groups work to evaluate the work done so far on PLCs, reorg., prof. dev.	ILTs	Needs assessment	Structural
1/16/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training – using internet databases; evaluating prof. dev.; time to work and talk with other Mentors and IFs	IFs & Mentors	Training on professional development Data Use	Individual
1/20 & 1/21/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training on system-wide inservice days on a Best Bet; on working as an ILT; and on “Lessons from the Field”; calendar for follow-up activities	ILT members	Training on ILT functions Defining roles and relationships	Individual

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
1/26/04	Riverside Bulletin	Principal	This weekly bulletin from the principal at the school mentions PLCs several times. This is a good example of the language being used in schools	Superintendent	None intended	Political Cultural
1/30/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training – math & business ed.; mid-year feedback – a response focus group on Reorganization, PLCs and school-based prof. dev.	IFs & Mentors	Training content knowledge Needs assessment	Individual
2/3/04	Goal Setting	CILTs	These are the typed documents that were developed at the Jan. 20/21 staff development for ILTs	ILTs	Initiative development at school level Needs assessment	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
2/10/04	Letter	Mentor	Letter from mentor sharing a book study and its product with the Superintendent. This is an example of the work of the Mentors	Superintendent	None intended	Political
2/13/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Lessons From the Field – walk throughs visits at 5 schools at all levels; how to set goals; how to collect data	ILT Teams	Training on walkthrough	Individual
2/18/04	Lesson Plan for Ed Leadership Team Meeting	CILTs	Review the Lessons Learned from the Field	Principals Supervisors	Training on walkthroughs	Individual

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
2/25-27/04	CILT Retreat	Superintendent	The retreat was to review all data gathered so far; mid-year eval. On PLC, ILTs, new supervisor role, professional development, observation data	CILTs	Initiative development Monitoring and oversight Needs assessment	Structural
3/8/04	Email	Superintendent	This was an email sent by the Superintendent to share her views on the reorganization and PLCs	All Staff	Communicating vision messages	Cultural
3/12/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training program knowledge for things like PreK, K, Music; collaborating with a same role partner; how to provide content specific prof. dev.; mentor skills; sharing ideas that work	IFs & Mentors	Defining role of mentors Needs assessment on walkthroughs	Individual

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
3/26/04 3/29/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training-revisiting ILT goals; Prof. Dev. Survey; making sense of walkthrough data; ILT self-assessment	ILT Teams	Data use Training on use of Best Bet Training on walkthroughs	Individual
4/6/04	Email	Coordinator of Curr. & Prof. Development	Summarizes and communicates the hypotheses formulated by the ILTs during their walkthrough debriefing; shares external consultant basic criteria for an action hypothesis (both for elementary & secondary)	ILT Teams	Training	Individual
4/23/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training-General Curriculum Update, social studies knowledge; IF role clarification	IFs & Mentors	Content Training in curriculum training on observations/evaluations Communicating expectations for summer curriculum work	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
4/28/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Ed. Leadership Meeting agenda and lesson plan for mid-year report	Principals Supervisors	Initiative development Needs assessment	Structural
4/29/04	Presentation	Superintendent	This was a presentation done for the Superintendent's Learning Council which is a group that works together on Baldrige and other things. There is a facilitator present.	Superintendent's Learning Council	Communicating vision messages	Cultural
4/30/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training-content for math, cognitive coaching; sharing the lead (PLC dimensions); Mid-Year Report sharing; sharing MD Prof. Dev. Standards from MSDE	IFs & Mentors	Communicating vision messages for the mentoring program Training-Cognitive Coaching	Cultural Individual

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
Spring 2004	Mid-Year Report	CILTs	Feedback on how the reorganization, PLCs and school-based prof. dev.	IFs & Mentors	Needs assessment Initiative development	Structural
5/3/04	Curriculum Walkthrough	CILTs	Documents and process for walkthrough training at High School #20.	ILTs (Select)	Training	Individual
5/7/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training-on secondary reform; journaling, math and science content, observation for mentors; positive energy	IFs & Mentors	Training	Individual
5/11/04	Personal Notes	Superintendent	CILT meeting to discuss master calendar for next school year; evaluation of IFs & mentors and who is not accepting the new role	CILTs	Initiative development ideas	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
5/14/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training-Math content, discussion of observation data; controversy over journaling	IFs & Mentors	Training Defining beliefs on journaling	Individual Political
5/21/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training-Co-teaching; math & technology content knowledge	IFs & Mentors	Training Designing sharing structures	Individuals
5/28/04	Agenda+	CILTs	Training-program knowledge for art, foreign lang., and ESOL; sharing the lead (PLCs) with Department Chairs	IFs & Mentors	Training for ILT functions and PLC functions	Political
6/8/04	Lesson Plan	CILTs	Lesson Plan for the Ed. Leadership Meeting; sharing priorities on PLCs and student achievement; sharing work plan for next year; new calendar for 2004-2005	Principals Supervisors	Defining priorities Initiative development Training on PLCs	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
6/11/04	Agenda+	CILTs	End of Year Luau-Superintendent comments; district priorities; short-term work plan for ILTs & CILTs	IFs & Mentors	Defining priorities Initiative development Training on PLCs	Structural
6/24/04	Agenda	CILTs	Instructional Leadership	ILTs	Training	Structural
6/25/04			Conference covered all strands of Best Bets, PLCs, Team Configuration & Relationships; test data and SI Plan format	Supervisors	Communication of expectations Training on PLC, ILTs, Best Bets, roles and relationships	Individual
June 2004	Feedback	Coordinator of Curr. & Prof. Development	Feedback from new teachers who participated in the end of the year new teacher workshops	Mentors & IFs	Initiative development	Structural Political

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
June 2004	Observation Data	Assistant Superintendent	Summary tables showing the observations completed by all ILT members over the four quarters of the school year	CILTs ILTs	Monitoring and oversight Comm. expectations	Structural
6/24/04	2004-2005 Work Plan	CILTs	Includes master calendar, system priorities, beliefs, actions for priorities, required actions for CILTs, professional development calendar	All instructional personnel	Initiative development Communicating expectations	Structural

Stage: Implementation Year 1 - Initiation
Chronology of District Actions

Date	Artifact	Initiator	Purpose	Audience	District Action Represented	System Influenced
8/11/04	CILT Retreat	CILTs	CILTs met to refine our work on the new quarterly cycle of training for all ILT staff; developed topics and material for the 1 st cycle; final plans for 8/24/04 A&S reception and kick off for the year; evaluation of June 24/25 Leadership Conference; plan school CILT visits; CILT 2004-2005 Work Plan	CILTs	Initiative planning Needs assessment	Structural

*This artifact has been described in memo form

Appendix G. Time Ordered Matrix: Dates and Actions Directed at Targeted Employee Groups

Time Ordered Matrix: Dates and Actions Directed at Targeted Employee Groups

<u>Group</u>	<u>Reform Period</u>					
	<u>Planning & Preparation (2002-03)</u>			<u>Implementation Year 1 (2003-2004)</u>		
Superintendent	8/02	10/14-24/02	11/4/02	8/17/03	2/10/04	
	12/11/02	2/03	4/8/03			
	4/10/03	4/23/03	5/2/03			
	6/1/03	6/4/03	June 03			
Senior Staff	10/14-24/02	11/4/02	11/02			
	11/7/02	2/03	5/2/03			
CILTs	4/14/02	11/27/02	11/16/02	7/15/03	8/20/03	8/29/03
	3/11/03	4/23/03	4/30/03	9/3/03	9/8/03	10/31/03
	5/6/03	5/7/03	5/9/03	11/11/03	12/2/03	12/17/03
	5/12/03	5/16/03	6/9/03	1/6/04	2/25-27/04	5/11/04
	June 03			June 04	8/11/04	
Board of Education	11/4/02	11/02	11/23/02			
	1/13/03	4/23/03	6/4/03			
ILT	2/6/03	6/12/03	6/19/03	Summer 03	8/4-6/03	8/22/03
	6/23/03	6/30/03		9/12/03	9/15/03	10/30-31/03
				1/16/04	1/20-21/04	2/3/04
				2/13/04	3/26/04	3/29/04
				6/24-25/04	June 04	
SIT Team	3/11/03					
Principals	3/11/03	4/4/03	5/27/03	8/28/03	10/21/03	12/18/03
	6/6/03			12/19/03	2/18/04	4/28/04
				6/8/04		
Assistant Principals						

Time Ordered Matrix: Dates and Actions Directed at Targeted Employee Groups

<u>Group</u>	<u>Reform Period</u>					
	<u>Planning & Preparation (2002-03)</u>			<u>Implementation Year 1 (2003-2004)</u>		
All A & S	11/02	1/2/03	3/11/03	7/7/03	8/13-14/03	10/21/03
	4/4/03	6/6/03	6/19/03	3/8/04		
Instructional Facilitators	5/27/03			8/29/03	9/5/03	9/19/03
				9/26/03	10/24/03	11/7/03
				11/21/03	12/5/03	12/12/03
				1/9/04	1/16/04	1/30/04
				3/12/04	4/23/04	4/30/04
				Spring 04	5/3/04	5/14/04
				5/21/04	5/28/04	6/11/04
Mentors				7/3/03	8/7/03	8/19/03
				8/20/03	9/5/03	9/19/03
				9/26/03	10/24/03	11/7/03
				11/21/03	12/5/03	12/12/03
				1/9/04	1/16/04	3/12/04
				4/23/04	4/30/04	Spring 04
				5/3/04	5/14/04	5/21/04
				5/28/04	6/11/04	June 04
Department Chairs	Winter 02	3/26/03				
Remaining Central Office Supervisors	5/27/03	6/30/03		9/8/03	9/15/03	10/21/03
				12/18/03	2/18/04	4/28/04
				6/8/04	6/24-25/04	
PPWs				10/21/03		
Teachers	3/13/03	6/19/03		8/23/03	6/24/04	
External Groups	5/12/03	5/21/03		9/15/03	4/29/04	

Appendix H. Time Ordered Matrix: Dates of District Actions by Stage of the Initiative on PLCs

Time Ordered Matrix: Dates of District Actions by Stage of the Initiative on PLCs

<u>District Action</u>		<u>Reform Period</u>				
		Stage I			Stage II	
Reorganization of system, time, schools or creation of supportive structures to support the work of developing PLCs in the schools	Aug. 02	11/4/02	11/16/02	June 03		
	10/14-	Nov. 02	11/23/02			
	10/24/02	11/7/02	12/11/02			
	1/13/03	Feb. 03	4/8/03			
	4/30/03	5/2/03				
Resource allocation such as time, people, materials, or special forms of funding	4/14/02	11/7/02	4/23/03	6/23/03	7/15/03	
	11/27/02	1/02/03	5/7/03	6/30/03	9/26/03	
	Nov. 02	Feb. 03	6/1/03	7/3/03	12/2/03	
Defining vision, values, and beliefs about the value of PLCs	Aug. 02	11/4/02	11/23/02	10/21/03		
	10/14-	Nov. 02	Winter 02	12/18/03		
	10/24/02	11/7/02	5/12/03			
Assessing the needs of the district and schools and promoting the use of data; initiative development	Aug. 02	11/4/02	Feb. 03	6/19/03	8/19/03	10/30-31/03
	10/14-	11/7/02	2/6-3/13/03	6/23/03	8/22/03	11/11/03
	10/24/02	11/16/02	3/11/03	June 03	8/23/03	12/2/03
	3/26/03	4/8/03	4/23/03	8/4-6/03	8/29/03	12/17/03
	5/9/03	5/12/03	5/16/03	8/13-14/03	9/8/03	12/19/03
	5/20/03	6/1/03	5/19/03	8/17/03	9/26/03	1/9/04
				1/16/04	1/16/04	1/30/04
				2/3/04	2/18/04	2/25-27/04
				3/12/0	3/26-29/04	4/28/04
				Spring 04	5/11/04	6/8/04
				6/11/04	June 04	6/24/04
				8/11/04		
	Defining and communicating expectations for the schools and staff	3/11/03	4/10/03	5/27/03	6/6/03	7/7/03
4/4/03		5/2/03	6/1/03	6/9/03	8/13-14/03	9/5/03
4/8/03		5/16/03		6/30/03	8/20/03	9/12/03
				12/18/03	9/26/03	12/2/03
				4/23/04	12/12/03	6/24/04
				6/8/04		

Time Ordered Matrix: Dates of District Actions by Stage of the Initiative on PLCs

<u>District Action</u>	<u>Reform Period</u>					
	Stage I			Stage II		
Defining priorities and maintaining focus on the PLC initiative	4/14/02 Nov. 02 11/7/02	11/23/02 5/12/03		6/9/03 8/22/03 6/8/04	6/11/04	
Providing training	11/27/02 2/6-3/13/03 3/11/03 5/21/03	4/4/03 5/12/03 5/16/03 5/27/03	5/16/03 5/19/03 5/20/03 6/1/03	6/6/03 6/12/03 6/19/03 Summer 03 7/3/03 12/5/03 1/30/04 4/6/04 5/3/04 5/21/04 6/11/04	8/7/03 8/13-14/03 8/28/03 8/29/03 9/26/03 1/16/04 2/13/04 4/23/04 5/7/04 5/28/04 6/24-25/04	10/21/03 10/24/03 10/30-31/03 11/7/03 11/21/03 1/20-21/04 3/26-29/04 4/30/04 5/14/04 6/8/04
Monitoring and oversight of the schools' progress				6/19/03 12/18/03 2/25-27/04	10/31/03 1/6/04 6/28/-7/10/04	12/17/03 1/9/04 June 04
Communication of vision messages to school administrators and school staff	11/23/02 Winter 02 3/11/03	3/26/03 4/23/03 5/2/03	6/4/03	6/6/03 6/9/03 8/13-14/03	8/20/03 9/15/03 10/30-31/03	3/8/04 4/29/04 4/30/04
Defining roles and responsibilities for the ILT members and the school staff	Nov. 02 11/7/02 11/16/02 4/23/03	12/11/02 3/11/03 3/26/03 4/4/03	4/4/03 4/8/03 4/10/03	6/6/03 8/20/03 1/9/04 8/22/03 8/28/03	8/29/03 9/3/03 9/8/03 9/12/03 1/20-21/04	10/24/03 11/21/03 12/12/03 3/12/04 6/24-25/04

Appendix I. List of 10 Study Schools

Table 1. School and System Student Demographic Profile 2003-2004:
Suburban District and Study Schools

Unit	Student Enrollment (2003-04)	Per Cent Special Education	Per Cent Limited English Proficient	Per Cent FaRMS-eligible	Per Cent White	Per Cent African-American	Per Cent Other Non-White*
Suburban District (Total)	40,252+	14.7	0.7	17.5	79.2	15.5	5.3
American Middle School	1,299	20.8	0.5	39.2	57.5	34.5	7.8
Leadership High School	1,793	10.2	0.3	3.8	91.0	4.4	4.5
Level Elementary School	384	15.5	0.0	14.7	94.0	2.8	3.1
Military Drive Elementary School**	441	17.6	2.5	54.0	39.6	49.4	10.8
River Walk Middle School	657	16.8	++	36.6	76.8	18.2	4.8
Upper Cross Roads Elementary School	480	21.5	0.0	3.4	97.5	0.6	1.8
Community Elementary School	593	15.3	0.0	19.1	72.5	21.9	5.5
Community High School	1,053	13.7	0.0	20.9	64.2	30.5	5.2
Open Space Elementary School**	589	15.2	++	73.0	32.4	60.9	6.6
Hoyle Middle School	935	18.0	++	37.3	61.3	33.5	5.0

*Includes Native American, Asian, Hispanic students

**School designated to receive Title 1 services

+ Based upon 2003-04 student enrollment, ranks 7th in size among 24 Maryland Local School Systems. For the 1999-2000 school year, ranked 121st among school systems in the United States (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, Common Core of Data Survey, 1999-2000).

++N<5 (not reported)

Table 2: Student Achievement and Participation, 2003-04
Suburban District and Study Schools

Unit	Average Per Cent Attending*	Per Cent Graduating**	Per Cent Meeting State Performance Standard in Reading***	Per Cent Meeting State Performance Standard in Mathematics****	AYP Status: Reading	AYP Status: Mathematics
Suburban District (Total)	94.2	85.2	76.1	65.4		Met
American Middle School	92.2	NA	50.3	31.6	Not Met for Special Education	Not Met for Special Education
Leadership High School	94.3	91.1	88.8	64.4	Met	Met
Level Elementary School	95.9	NA	80.3	72.6	Met	Met
Military Drive Elementary School	94.8	NA	65.7	74.5	Met	Met
River Walk Middle School	92.3	NA	57.9	42.6	Met	Met
Upper Cross Roads Elementary School	96.0	NA	91.9	87.7	Met	Met
Community Elementary School	95.5	NA	68.7	74.3	Met	Met
Community High School	89.8	81.4	65.5	37.0	Met	Met
Open Space Elementary School	93.6	NA	61.1	64.2	Met	Met
Hoyle Middle School	92.9	NA	62.6	37.1	Met	Met

*Total Number of Days Attended/Number of Days Belonging

**Per cent of 12th grade students receiving a high school diploma

***Per Cent of Students at Proficient or Advanced on Maryland School Assessment—Reading and Mathematics (administered grades 3, 5, 8, 10 (Reading), Geometry) or Alternative Maryland Assessment—Reading and Mathematics (administered to severely cognitively-impaired students in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11).

Table 3. Qualifications of Instructional Staff: Suburban District
(Total) and Selected Schools: 2003-04

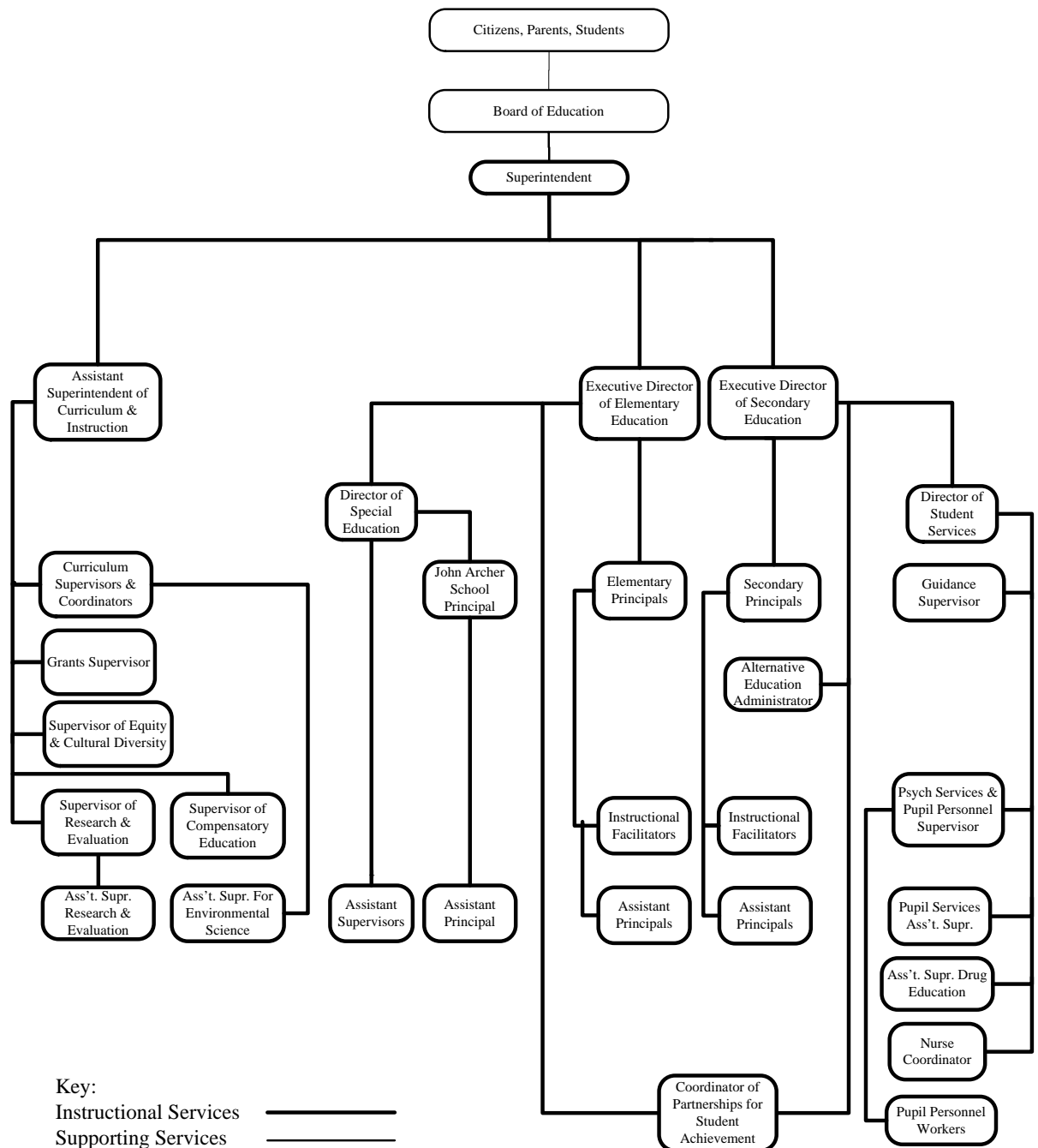
Unit	Instructional Facilitators	Teacher Mentor	% Teachers with More than 10 Years Experience	%Teachers Advanced Professional Certificate	#Teachers Conditional Certificate	% Classes Taught by Not Highly Qualified Teachers
Suburban District Total				53.5	3.5	19.9
American Middle School	0.5	0.5	23	45.7	10.0	40.4
Leadership High School	0.5	0.5	51	67.4	4.7	21.5
Level Elementary School	0.2	0.5	62	81.8	4.5	11.5
Military Drive Elementary School	0.2	0.5	27	47.2	0.0	14.1
River Walk Middle School	0.5	0.5	35	60.6	3.0	27.2
Upper Cross Roads Elementary School	0.2	0.5	63	75.0	0.0	12.9
Community Elementary School	0.2	0.5	24	36.8	5.3	15.5
Community High School	0.5	0.5	25	28.9	4.4	13.0
Open Space Elementary School	0.5	0.5	9	31.5	0.0	19.5
Hoyle Middle School	0.5		32	40.9	6.8	35.1

Table 4. Suburban District (Total) and Selected Schools: Teacher Perceptions of Dimensions of School as Learning Organization and Perceived Role Baseline (June, 2003): Dimension Means and Standard Deviations

Group	Participatory Leadership*	Shared Vision**	Collective Staff Learning***	Peer Sharing+	Supportive Conditions and Capacities++	Total Readiness#	Collective Efficacy##
Suburban District Total— Elementary (N=1021)	7.65 <i>1.43</i>	12.69 <i>1.78</i>	20.04 <i>2.75</i>	5.68 <i>2.06</i>	19.71 <i>3.07</i>	65.76 <i>8.58</i>	14.99 <i>2.32</i>
Suburban District Total— Middle (N=460)	6.90 <i>1.61</i>	11.66 <i>2.10</i>	18.57 <i>3.12</i>	5.47 <i>1.98</i>	18.41 <i>3.53</i>	61.15 <i>10.27</i>	13.83 <i>2.81</i>
Suburban District Total—High (N=643)	6.94 <i>1.64</i>	11.07 <i>2.17</i>	17.18 <i>3.39</i>	5.27 <i>1.95</i>	16.65 <i>3.63</i>	57.18 <i>10.31</i>	12.58 <i>2.83</i>
American Middle (N=50)	5.86 <i>1.55</i>	10.02 <i>2.66</i>	17.06 <i>3.59</i>	4.56 <i>1.78</i>	15.61 <i>3.83</i>	53.12 <i>10.97</i>	12.82 <i>3.56</i>
Leadership High (N=96)	7.29 <i>2.00</i>	12.17 <i>2.17</i>	18.51 <i>3.36</i>	4.99 <i>2.13</i>	17.82 <i>3.71</i>	60.30 <i>10.24</i>	13.48 <i>2.96</i>
Level Elementary (N=6)	6.41 <i>0.40</i>	12.12 <i>1.11</i>	17.83 <i>1.85</i>	5.37 <i>1.52</i>	19.58 <i>2.61</i>	61.33 <i>5.72</i>	13.20 <i>1.09</i>
Military Drive Elementary (N=27)	8.22 <i>1.13</i>	12.75 <i>1.46</i>	19.93 <i>2.12</i>	5.98 <i>1.84</i>	20.20 <i>2.25</i>	66.50 <i>6.52</i>	14.55 <i>2.53</i>
River Walk Middle (N=39)	7.94 <i>1.06</i>	12.85 <i>1.55</i>	19.98 <i>2.33</i>	5.83 <i>1.85</i>	20.89 <i>2.56</i>	68.37 <i>6.62</i>	14.72 <i>2.53</i>
Upper Cross Roads Elementary (N=29)	8.44 <i>1.34</i>	13.62 <i>1.31</i>	21.33 <i>2.10</i>	5.57 <i>2.28</i>	21.65 <i>2.24</i>	70.31 <i>6.19</i>	15.77 <i>1.80</i>
Community Elementary (N=35)I	8.49 <i>1.05</i>	13.69 <i>1.31</i>	21.08 <i>2.09</i>	7.11 <i>1.65</i>	20.88 <i>2.12</i>	71.27 <i>6.63</i>	14.88 <i>2.69</i>
Community High School (N=47)	5.58 <i>1.73</i>	10.45 <i>2.12</i>	15.60 <i>3.77</i>	4.97 <i>2.03</i>	15.10 <i>3.90</i>	51.35 <i>11.68</i>	12.06 <i>2.70</i>
Open Space Elementary (N=74)	8.15 <i>1.23</i>	13.88 <i>0.95</i>	21.56 <i>2.86</i>	6.43 <i>1.81</i>	21.77 <i>2.56</i>	71.25 <i>7.60</i>	14.89 <i>2.38</i>
Hoyle Middle (N=51)	7.36 <i>1.40</i>	11.22 <i>1.85</i>	18.90 <i>2.57</i>	6.10 <i>1.70</i>	18.84 <i>2.96</i>	62.30 <i>8.55</i>	12.31 <i>2.97</i>

Appendix J. Organizational Charts

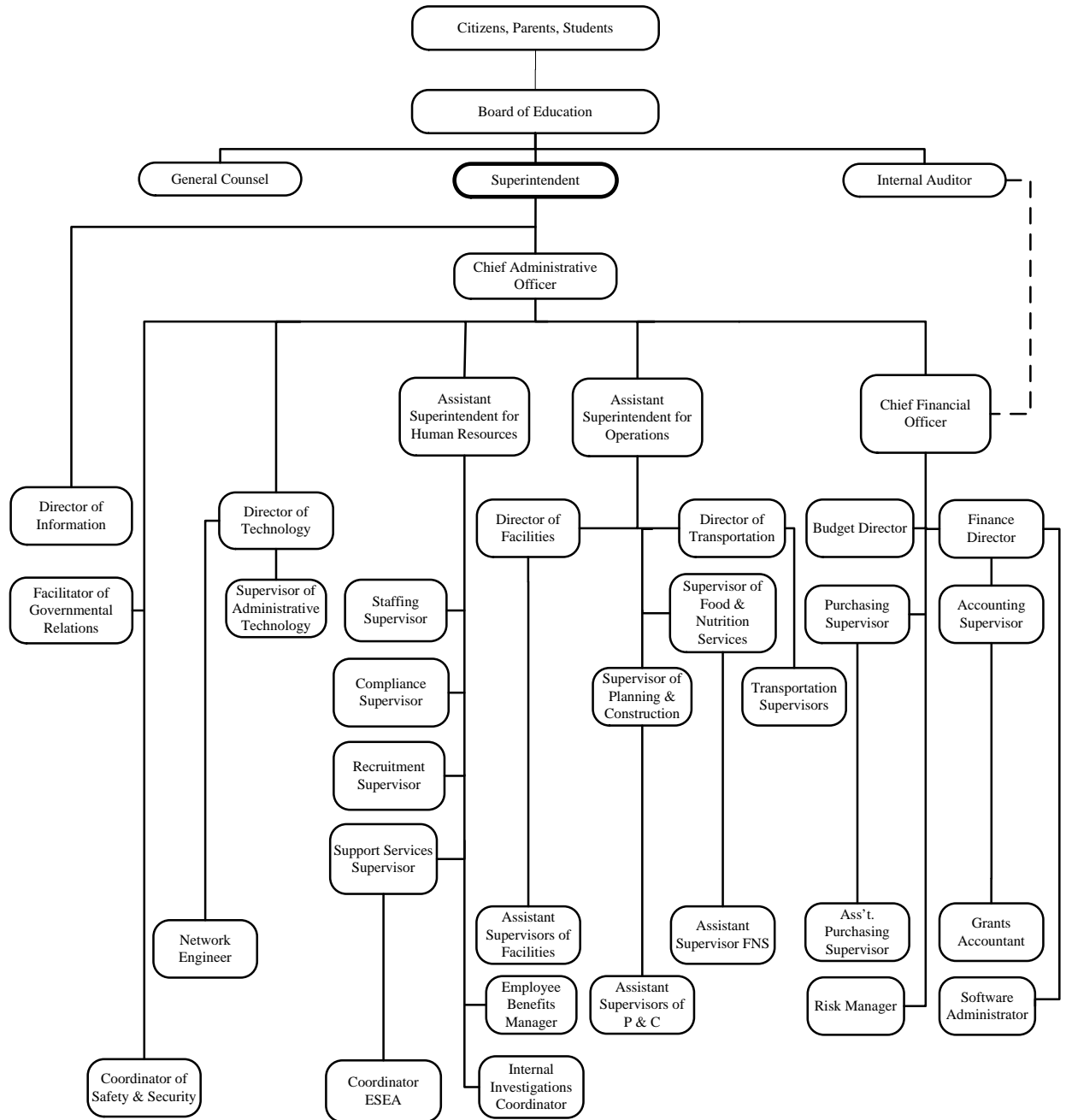
Suburban District
Administration Organization - Instructional
2003 - 2004



Suburban District

Administration Organization - Supporting Services

2003 -2004



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